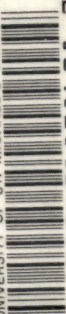


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ON PIETY

Nihil Obstat.

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CENSOR DEPUTATUS.

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ON PIETY

BY THE
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PREFACE

THE author is well aware of the perils of writing on Piety, such is the discredit attaching to works of the kind.

He undertakes it, nevertheless, being persuaded that he is doing a useful and perhaps necessary work.

His aim is to encourage esteem for piety, not only among those who are given to pious practices, but also among those who treat it with disdain, as something paltry, or speak evil of it, as if the practice of it were degrading.

It is with this end in view that he makes a study of its nature, explains its effects, and lays down rules for the use of it.

There is nothing nobler than piety, since it awakens and applies the activity of the soul to the highest, purest, and most fruitful of lives, the very life of God.

Preface

Nothing is more advantageous than piety, since, by the close contact which it establishes with God, and by the constant effort which it obliges a man to make with regard to himself, it purifies the feelings, enlightens the mind, strengthens the will, gladdens the heart, and stirs up an apostolic fire in the soul.

But piety only preserves its worth and yields all its fruits when it is led by the spirit of wisdom. It would cease to be itself, it would disfigure the soul and become repellent, if it degenerated into a superstitious and sterile formalism.

Piety has to repel the attacks of which it is the object by uplifting character and by enriching with a wealth of virtues those who live by it.

Whenever—as should be the case—pious people show most common sense, most dignity of demeanour, most sympathy, most disinterestedness and most self-sacrifice, piety and religion itself will need no more apologists; the lives of those who pray will be its most unanswerable defence.

If those who are pious will try to enter into the spirit of this little book,

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the author hopes both that their religious life will be full of sweet consolation to themselves, and that their example will win over to piety a number of those, who, though fundamentally religious, do not dare to risk an undertaking which they fear may involve them in bitter disappointment.

May this book give many souls a taste for God! From this they will find spontaneously arise a taste for the good.

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ON PIETY

PART I THE NATURE OF PIETY

I

HOW PIETY IS MISUNDERSTOOD

“Godliness [piety] is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. iv. 8).

THIS praise of piety by St. Paul must seem strange to worldly folk, for the world does not esteem piety and has nothing but disdain for those who practise it.

The world looks upon piety as useless, good for those who have nothing else to do, and likely to foster delusions in the heads of those who are touched with mysticism, but as having no bearing upon real life,

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and as being rather lowering to the faculties of those who are given to it. If man's most sacred duty is to develop his life, he must have nothing to do with piety, which tends to enfeeble it.

What right has the world to pass such a severe judgment upon piety? It declares that the grounds for such a judgment are supplied by the pious themselves. It has examined the connection between their piety and their life, and it claims that their life gains nothing from their piety. So far as their piety is concerned, their life is neither purer, nor more fruitful, nor more devoted, nor less worldly, nor less selfish, nor less full of pride.

Such a sweeping sentence is assuredly unjust. For amongst the pious there are a number of choice souls who are truly holy, humble, sympathetic, generous, ready for every sacrifice, diligent in the hardest of tasks, boldly making their way in life, and who are second to none in moral energy, in nobility of heart, and even in practical success. And to anyone who follows them closely, it is plain that it is their piety that

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sustains and makes them great, and that they draw from communion with God the strength to subdue their lower passions, and owe to prayer their lofty aspirations. And were not the Saints, who are the greatest of men, all moulded by piety?

But it must be admitted that by the side of these characters, who get their greatness from their piety, there are commonplace and vulgar souls who are taken up with the externals and practices of piety, and who, nevertheless, have been made no better by it. They wear a mask of piety, but know nothing of its living reality. They flatter themselves that they please God with their long prayers and their numerous medals and scapulars, and by joining all kinds of confraternities and third orders; and they forget that God takes no pleasure in these external things, unless they help to purify the heart, to subdue the passions, to make one fulfil the duties of one's state of life and grow in moral perfection and social influence.

This perverted, though sincere, piety, which is confined to formalities and does not carry with it any moral

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obligation, which submits to external discipline without changing anything within, is more harmful to the fair fame of devotion than hypocrisy itself. For hypocrisy, which is urged by its ambition to clothe itself in an appearance of religion, is unmasked and confounded sooner or later. False piety, on the contrary, because of its sincerity and perseverance, offers the continued spectacle of a superficial, barren and impotent religion, which fritters away the soul by mechanical routine and lifeless exercises. Thus it is that, in spite of their good intentions, some of the devout, through their misinterpretation of a life of devotion, convince the world that piety, far from having the promise of the life that now is, depreciates men and sterilizes them in every way, and makes them incapable of fulfilling their destiny.

Is there any reason to be astonished that most men, urged on by the need of making a living, and panting with the desire to conquer in the struggle for existence, neglect the practices of religion, in which they fail to find a weapon that makes them stronger, but only a burden which crushes out

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their breath and clogs their feet? Their contempt is their excuse for standing aloof.

If it is not always a fault, it is at any rate a misfortune, for men to be ignorant of the nature and value of piety, for it is a source of life that is closed to them. All ought to know it better, both those who make use of its exercises and those who shun even the very appearance of it.

Those who have already adopted its practices will gain by going to the root of the matter. How many of them get perhaps no advantage from it? If they were only to learn that it is an interior life, that the external practices are nothing but the shell, that its object is to change the heart, that it is vain and utterly servile, if it does not make us better, would they not esteem it more highly, and follow its rules more gladly, and find it a help towards growth in goodness?

At the same time they would be in the eyes of the world the vindicators and apostles of piety. As long as the world sees no difference between those who pray and those who do not pray at all, it cannot help being

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sceptical about the real bearing of piety. If it perceives some souls cramped and lessened by a pretence of piety, or others sheltering weaknesses, which they dare not acknowledge, under the cloak of religion, it is easy to understand that they are tempted to speak against it. But, whenever piety manifests itself to men as being an evident cause of the noblest feelings, of self-sacrifice generously accepted, of work courageously undertaken, of suffering patiently endured, of devotion that is entirely disinterested, they will then understand the full value of introducing real piety into one's life, and how important it is to rely upon religion in order to attain moral elevation.

How great, then, is the responsibility incurred by the devout, when, by carelessness, they bring piety down to the level of worthless formalism, and cause it to be despised by those unacquainted with it, who, when they look for it in them, find only a miserable caricature of it. On the other hand, what a grand apostolate their life would afford, if they offered the world the encouraging spectacle of a piety that

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was practical, a piety that lit up human life with sanctity and the power of God !

Through the evidence of the practical effects of true piety, the world would recognize the potency of its moral action ; and, thenceforward, would begin to hold it in esteem. From esteem to the desire for its possession, the distance is but short. And if we consider the need of moral progress, on the one hand, which is experienced by most men, and the fragility, on the other hand, that they feel in their will, we may conclude that honest hearts would take refuge in the practices of religion as in a shelter prepared for their weakness, and that they would arm themselves with piety as a store of Divine strength fitted to supply what was lacking in their infirmity. If they were persuaded by the example of pious people and by the luminous arguments of religious books, that piety is a power, and that it is a regenerative leaven for the fallen and a store of holy energy for those who wish ever to go forward, there is no doubt that they would be attracted by its benefits, and that

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they would desire to taste of its sweetness and to experience its power.

And therefore, in order at the same time to deepen the life of those who pray, and to attract to the life of piety those who have not begun to pray, we shall now attempt to set forth the nature and effects of true piety.

II

PIETY IS AN IMPULSE OF DEVOTED LOVE

THE word "piety" calls up the thought of love and devotion, and it gives an idea of an affection going to the point of self-surrender.

We say of a child that he has "filial piety" when he shows tender, refined and generous feelings towards his parents, when his love fills their hearts with joy, and when he sacrifices something that touches himself or his belongings in order to defend or assist them.

When we call upon Christ, it is to His loving devotion (*pietas*) that we appeal. We say to Him: "O loving Jesus! *O Jesu Pie! Pie Jesu*

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Domine !" Do we not then invoke the affection and loving-kindness of Him who "loved us and gave Himself for us"?

There is also such a thing as maternal devotion, consisting of love and self-sacrifice; and it is to this feeling that we appeal when we say to the Blessed Virgin: "O Mother, who hast so much loved us and who hast endured so much for us!"

From these ideas it is easy for us to deduce what are the characteristics of Christian piety. It is a religious inclination, certainly, but an inclination accentuated by a love that is full of devotion. It comprises the whole of religion, but it adds to it the fervour of love.

Piety is, first of all, a religious impulse. It therefore assumes that man is in the presence of God, his Creator; it makes man confess that he is the work of God; it leads him to the feet of God, to adore Him prostrate in the dust, and to thank Him for all His benefits; it makes him raise supplicating hands to Heaven, to implore the sovereign Master to console him in his wretchedness and poverty. Thus, on this ground alone, piety

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enables a man to perform the highest act of which he is capable, for it takes him by that which touches him most intimately and most deeply, and leads him on to that which is greatest—even to God Himself. Thus, a union is effected between that which is best within and that which is best outside of man. And, in the presence of this sublime encounter, the most powerful minds are overwhelmed with admiration, for it is a stirring and awful mystery, that can only be experienced by those who are entirely sincere and full of humility and reverence.

In these relationships of a religious nature, adoration is the prevailing factor; close intimacy is not set up: they are full of awe, and not of love. And, apart from Christianity, religion stops there.

The pagan never loved his divinities; he feared his gods, he offered them bloody sacrifices because he was afraid, and because he wished to appease them by immolating what was dearest to him. God did not seem to him good and kind, but severe, exacting, and capricious, and the worship of God was intended to ward off the Divine vengeance.

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The Mohammedan apprehends God as being in inaccessible majesty. He prostrates himself before Him because He is great, he obeys Him because he knows that His vengeance is inexorable; but he does not make his supplication to the Father's heart, because he believes the world is enchained in the irrevocable fatalism of His eternal designs.

The Jew, too, lived under the law of fear. The password for all who would enter the Temple was: "*Pavete ad sanctuarium meum*," "Tremble at My sanctuary."* In the inspiration of their sacred hymns, the prophets sometimes had illuminating light as to the love and the mercy of God, and then they celebrated His loving-kindness; but reverence is what predominates in the ancient worship. Although God was infinitely nearer to the chosen people than to any other nation, He had not become so intimate with them as to make them love Him.

The Christian alone it is who loves God, because he alone has seen Him with his eyes and touched Him with his hands in the mystery of the Incar-

* Lev. xxvi. 2.

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nation, and holds Him in his keeping in the ineffable mystery of the Eucharist. Adoration is always his first act of worship, but love is its end and crown. And this is what transforms the religion of the Christian into piety.

Love for God arises in a Christian's heart from the fact that he knows God less as a Master than as a Father. In the work of creation, and, above all, in the work of redemption, he sees God principally under His paternal aspect. Without in any way derogating from the majesty of the Creator, His loving-kindness is progressively manifested towards us. God has made us because He loved us from all eternity. He fashioned our hearts one by one. He watches over us, and by His providence supplies our needs; He encircles us with His beneficent presence, and His grace permeates our wills, just as the life-giving air fills our lungs. He is all-good, this Author of our being. How can we help loving Him? Still more evident are the signs of this loving-kindness in our Redeemer. He stretches out His hand to His fallen creatures to set them up again, but

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He does not stoop down from on high like a Master. He offers His hand to us on our own footing, like an equal and friend; for by faith we recognize our God under the veil of humanity, hiding the light that would daze us to show the tenderness that touches and draws the heart to Himself.

This feeling of loving-kindness, this intimacy of a God who is like ourselves, transforms our religious impulse. We go to God, not urged by fear, but won by love; we are less at His feet than in His arms. And hence it is piety that springs up in our hearts.

But the impulse of love is generous by nature. We refuse nothing to those we love; we offer everything, and surrender ourselves. Where fear reigns, what is given is a sacrifice; where love reigns, what is given is a spontaneous offering, made without reserve. When it is love that brings us to God, we come to Him with all that we have and are: our possessions, our powers, our time, our life, our mind and our heart. We put all in His hands. And, as He makes us feel that His arms are only open to

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receive souls that are worthy of Him, and who spend themselves in His service, our love lays upon us the high obligation of working at our own improvement, and on expending in an apostolic manner the gifts that we possess for service.

This devotion to the God whom we love, this eagerness to forward our own perfection and to spread the life of God round about us in order to please God and to win souls for Him—this it is that gives our religion its fruitfulness and makes our piety blossom forth, and carries it on, through the fruit that it bears, to its fulfilment.

Such is Christian piety. It imprints upon the religious impulse of our souls the twofold seal of love and generosity that characterize it. In the heart in which it has its birth, it is a feeling of filial affection towards God and an earnest desire for union with Him. It carries us along the path that leads to God, full of cheerfulness and zeal, in the direction of the object of our love. It does not expect that meeting with God will bring it the slumber of an idle repose, but a fresh activity for more fruitful work.

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Piety, then, is a form of religion, but it is also its highest, most intimate and active form. To religious adoration it joins love ; to sacrifice it adds the surrender of self and the ardour of zeal.

Religion suffices for salvation assuredly, because it gives the grace that is needed for the goodness that is indispensable. Piety is the best of Divine treasures ; it is the portion of souls touched by the shaft of the love of God, and it uplifts souls to the higher regions of moral life.

But we must take care not to mistake some of the externals of piety for piety itself. The exercises of it are only, as it were, its outer bark—a necessary covering, no doubt, but only required to keep in the sap which circulates within the pith. However unbroken the integument may be, there is no real piety if real, intense love is absent from the heart, and if faithful and active service is wanting in the hands.

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III

PIETY IS A FORM OF LIFE

THIS primary conception of piety enables us to affirm that it is a kind of life.

Although life is a mystery that we cannot fathom, and although it is easier to feel what it is than to explore its nature, at any rate we know that in a living being it is an interior activity. Consider the plant that grows and blossoms in the fields; note the animal that runs hither and thither, and the way in which it manifests its emotions. You say that they are alive. How do you distinguish them from stones without life? You observe that they live by the interior activity that animates them. If they were only moved from outside, like a ball in a game of tennis, you would treat them as inert bodies, because they would only have a borrowed motion; but because an inner force, which is real, though imperceptible to the eye, produces from within the phenomena that strike your observation, you attribute life to this hidden power.

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This activity in the living creature is subject to innumerable vicissitudes. It may increase in intensity, and its progress is brought out clearly by the manifestation of its happy effects; it may diminish so as to vanish altogether, and its manifestations then become less and less marked, until they disappear in death. To maintain itself and to grow, it must be nourished by borrowing from outside; and, since it wastes by its own action, it would perish if it were not renewed by the assimilation of external elements.

But we say that piety is a kind of life because it is, in the soul, analogous to the activity that is found in living creatures; it affords the same advantages, and is subject to the same exigencies.

Certainly, this life in the human soul takes very various forms. In the life of the intelligence, the mind seeks for truth and produces thought. Moral life is also an interior activity, whereby the will makes efforts towards the good by means of desires and resolutions. But the soul is capable of receiving a further fresh activity, whereby both mind and

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heart together seek God, and are united to Him by faith and love. This is piety.

There is no doubt but that piety is a true interior activity, since it sets in motion all the faculties of the soul, and since it overflows externally in the fruits that are the product of its fecundity.

First of all, the mind is brought into play, being enlightened by the splendours of faith. Having been awakened with regard to God, it fixes its attention upon Him, and advances daily in the knowledge of His infinite Being, until its thought cannot be torn away from an object of never-ending self-revelation. This happy intimacy withdraws the mind from the disturbing appearances of mean and changing things, and sustains it in an atmosphere of pure truth with which God Himself surrounds it.

And, then, immediately follows the heart with its increased treasures of activity. Under the spell of truth and beauty, it is carried away by the impulse of love, and repeats the word of St. Augustine: "O Beauty, ever ancient and ever fresh, too late

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have I known thee, too late have I loved thee !” This thrill of the heart leads on to union with the God of our love, and then, an ineffable intimacy between the Creator and His humble creature is set up in the depths of the soul. Whoever has felt the love of God knows by experience with what a lofty activity it enriches the heart.

The will, in turn, receives an increase of activity from the fact that God fills the soul with His strength. It is conscious of possessing a power for action that nature alone could not impart ; and, under the influence of grace called forth in it by piety, it makes decisions more boldly, sets to work with a more vigorous hand, does not shrink from painful sacrifices, and is better equipped for the fulfilment of duty. Through piety the soul is manifestly strengthened by the presence of a Being higher than itself.

This interior activity, which is the fruit of the life of piety, cannot be confined within. It reveals itself outwardly, as inevitably as the rising sap in spring is revealed in the buds of plants. Later on, we shall note

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what fruits are to be gathered on the tree of piety. But everyone knows that owing to the action of this interior life behaviour is leavened with modesty and self-control, the character becomes more gentle and even, speech is permeated with supernatural charity, the hands engage in works of zeal and devotion, and the whole man abandons himself to the inspiration of grace, to immolate selfishness and to make a disinterested gift of self; for the true sap of the life of piety produces only such fruits as these.

But this life, which is of such high value, is as unstable and fragile as the most delicate of living things. It would be an act of unpardonable carelessness not to watch over it.

And it is capable of increase. In Saints who abandon themselves to its sway, it rises daily ever higher and higher. Whether it be St. Francis of Sales or St. Vincent de Paul, St. Theresa or St. John of the Cross, whether they live unknown under the shadow of a monastery or lost amidst the crowd of a busy world, they attain to striking or humble sanctity by means of the cultivation

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of this life of piety. Their faith gains vitality, and they go to the invisible God with as much certainty as if they saw Him with their eyes. Their love, too, becomes more ardent, and, in the ecstasy of possessing their God, their tenderness of feeling participates in their joy, their breast expands, and their heart swells and beats more strongly. The will, too, as if healed of every weakness, endures suffering with cheerfulness and undertakes work with zeal, and perseveres in the most austere of sacrifices.

And this progress in the life of piety is only realized by the diligence used by the Saints in sustaining their souls by the exercises of religion. In order to lose nothing of the Divine gift, they watch the gate of their own heart with jealous care. By means of the practice of conscientious recollection, which cannot be observed without a constant mortification of the senses, they take good care not to let their mind and imagination wander abroad, and thus they put a stop to vain thoughts and disturbing fancies, which only create disorder in the inner man. And at the same time they have a holy

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hunger for spiritual nourishment; they love pious reading, and gather from it the bread of faith; then they assimilate this spiritual food by means of meditation; and, since the very exercise of an activity develops life, they arouse themselves by the inner motions of prayer, by aspirations towards God, and by incessant protestations of love and fidelity.

But, on the other hand, how many souls, alas! afford the sad spectacle of a progressive falling off! In the world there are many who pass from a life of fervour to an almost death-like coldness, and no one is surprised at it. Nor are they few in the priestly and religious state, nor even, perchance, in the cloister; and this is more to be wondered at. Wherever it is found, this falling off of life always passes through the same phases and follows from the same causes.

The beginning was full of fervour and facility; as long as there was a relish for the things of God, as long as piety required no effort, it was easy to be lulled by it. But soon sensible enjoyment disappeared, and the first enthusiasm wore off; to

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advance necessitated continual effort, and the toil became wearisome. Spiritual idleness began within; the external exercises went on, though the inner life was sinking; and by dint of growing slack, and despite of fugitive acts, it ended by losing all activity, even if it did not die out altogether. Then comes the stage of suppressing the external exercises, because they have come to be a burden; yet these might have restored life once more, and if, for instance, in a monastery, they are still kept up from necessity, they remain without effect, because the soul no longer is alive enough to assimilate the nourishment that they furnish.

It is strange that, as the love of life is so deeply rooted in man's heart, he is so careless about preserving and promoting it. Certainly, he loves his physical life, and nevertheless the fear of death leaves him careless in the face of perils that a prudent hygiene would keep at a distance. So, too, the Christian surely values his religious life; but he is not less light and lax in his way of meeting the dangers that a little energy would circumvent. If the love of life has

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so little hold upon our wills, it is because we are doubtless too ignorant of its value and advantage. Let us attempt to gain a more enlightened knowledge of it.

IV

PIETY IS THE LIFE OF GOD IN MAN

IF there be any reason that can add to our appreciation of the life of piety, it is having the assurance that piety is the life of God within us. This interior activity, which is an aspect of the inner impulse of piety, may be considered as divine from different points of view : first, because it seeks God ; next, because it finds Him and becomes possessed of Him ; and lastly, because it makes us participate in the very life of God.

All religious endeavour, and particularly that of piety, sets man in motion towards God. The man of piety is a pilgrim on the way to find God. He calls upon God with all the desires of his soul, and by the impatient curiosity of his mind, as well as by the ardent aspirations of

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his heart. In this quest he asks for God of every creature, of everything that lives on the face of the earth, of every immensity, like that of the ocean or of the heavens, of all that shines with bright and mysterious light, like the stars in the sky or genius amongst men. And in proportion as created things reply to him, "We are not thy God," his uneasiness increases, and he says with St. Augustine: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our heart cannot rest until it is stayed on Thee." To express his anxiety he might readily use the word of Canticles: "In my bed by night I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, and found Him not. I will rise, and will go about the city: in the streets and the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, and I found Him not. The watchmen, who keep the city, found me: Have you seen Him whom my soul loveth? When I had a little passed by them, I found Him whom my soul loveth; I held Him: and I will not let Him go till I bring Him into my mother's house."* These

* Cant. iii. 1-4.

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passionate words give a vivid picture of the emotion felt by every man who is torn with religious yearning; but they are still truer as an expression of the panting desire called forth in the soul by the life of piety. Is not God already our life when we feel such ardour, when He, too, becomes the object of a quest so engrossing and so eager?

Moreover, God does not conceal Himself from those who seek Him. He answers the pious Christian in the words that Pascal so often heard in the depths of his heart: "Be of good comfort; thou wouldst not seek Me, if thou hadst not found Me!" To every man who seeks God Himself with all sincerity of spirit, Jesus says: "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you."* This promise is infallible only, and then alone deserves to be so, when God is the object of our quest.

After seeking for God throughout creation, it is at the bottom of his own heart that man finds Him. This is not because God has not left traces of His power throughout the universe,

* Matt. vii. 7.

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not because He has not filled the world with His glory, but because nowhere is He known so clearly, nowhere is He felt so deeply, as at the bottom of the human heart. "The kingdom of God is within you,"* said Jesus. For this is where the meeting in piety between man and God takes place; there it is that man hears these sweet and strong words: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee. . . ."† "I am a closer friend to thee than this one or that, for I have done for thee more than they, and they would not endure for thee what I have suffered for thy sake. . . . I love thee more fervently than thou hast loved thy defilements. . . ."‡ There, too, it is that the Christian says to his God in the words of the Magdalene, "Rabboni (which is to say, Master),"§ or of the disciple brought back to the faith: "My Lord, and my God."||

Then it is that the soul enters into the possession of God. The august presence animates the pious soul, and

* Luke xvii. 21.

† Jer. xxxi. 3.

‡ Pascal, "Pensées de Mystère de Jésus."

§ John xx. 16.

|| John xx. 28.

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feelings of the greatest ardour and generosity arise therein. God Himself is the cause of this revival of activity; for through Him life makes a fresh start, so that it is again true to say that God, gained possession of through piety, adds an increase of life.

But He does far more. For piety not only takes hold of Him as of a treasure that one clasps in one's hand, nor like a guest whose comforting words one listens to; but it also incorporates Him within, it gets impregnated with Him, and He becomes its life. St. Paul, in his speech at Athens, tells us that God is all about us, like the air: "In Him we live and move and be."* St. Peter goes further still when he says that we are made "partakers of the divine nature."† We are, surely, still men, but a divine influence penetrates us through and through; the life of God is united with ours to uplift and transfigure us. This is an impenetrable mystery that faith cannot but adore, and which reason can only admire without making any impression upon it.

* Acts xvii. 28.

† 2 Pet. i. 4.

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This is why theology teaches us that God communicates His life to us in two ways: by nature and by grace. By nature, our life is only a pale likeness of His own. By grace, on the contrary, it is His very life that is given to us. It is, indeed, but a feeble ray emitted from its divine source, since the narrow prism of our soul can receive no more; but it is, in fine, a true ray coming from Him, and is rich with His own light and fruitfulness.

And we will not only say of this life that it is the delicious fruit of piety, but it is piety itself, and constitutes its living activity.

And what, in fact, are the acts of piety? It is by means of it, as we have said, that the soul seeks God, takes possession of God, and lives on God. But for a soul to perform such acts, God must already have taken up His abode within us by grace. It is He who is present in the soul, even before she is conscious of the fact; it is He who awakens her and fills her with uneasiness, and who urges her on to seek her Saviour with eagerness and perseverance; and so the first grace that God gives us is to

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stir 'up in us the desire to find Him. The second is that, in mercy and goodness, He comes to us and gives Himself to us; and the effort by means of which we gain possession of Him, as well as the love for Him that springs up in our hearts, is no less the work of His grace than of our liberty. He ends by becoming our interior activity, because His grace communicates to us that fertility of feeling and of work that are the crown of piety.

But if piety is the very life of God within us, let us beware of thinking that man has no part in it, for the important thing is to receive it, or to increase and preserve it. God only offers it for our free acceptance. He only puts it near us; our free-will alone can implant it within us. If we do not love it, if we do not take it, it is not ours, and remains outside us. Hence the life of piety is only ours at the same time as it is God's.

Indeed, it could not be otherwise, and God could not give us the life of piety in spite of ourselves. By this ineffable gift He means to make us greater, and He does this to the point of making us divine; but in exalting us in this way by means of the super-

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natural, it was important that He should not diminish us in our nature, and this is why, having regard for our liberty, He makes His gifts dependent upon our will.

And if God treats us thus, if He only gives us His life to preserve the dignity of ours and to uplift it afterwards to the height of His own, we must go towards Him with an eagerness born of thankfulness and love.

V

PIETY IS THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE CHRISTIAN

TO say that piety implants in us the life of God is to say that it gives us the life of Jesus Christ. For, since it has pleased God to reveal Himself to the world in His Son, Jesus Christ, it is by the Saviour that He communicates with us and lives in us. He is no longer the abstract and distant Omnipotent One, only figured by gross symbols in the imagination of the people; in the person of Jesus Christ He vouchsafes to make Himself seen and heard and touched, and He further vouchsafes to make His

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presence perceptible in our midst under the Eucharistic species until the end of time. If, then, it be in Jesus Christ that the Christian possesses his God, Jesus Himself will be the first principle of his life of piety, Jesus Himself will call forth the feelings of love and acts of prayer that bring God within us, and it is from Jesus that we shall get the fruitful activity which is piety.

That He is the soul of our piety, He Himself tells us in the Gospel: "Where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."* When Jesus says to His disciples, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by Me,"† He evidently puts Himself forward as the religious Mediator who is necessary for us to go to God by means of piety. And He reveals to us a still closer intimacy: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. . . . If any one abide not in Me; he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither,

* Matt. xviii. 20.

† John xiv. 6.

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and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you.”* Thus our prayer will bring forth fruit like the living branch of the vine, on condition that the very sap of Jesus be in us to make us fruitful. He declared the condition, on which the Christian abides *in Jesus and Jesus in him*, after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves: “He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me, and I in him.”† Thus, according to the Gospel, Jesus, living in the Christian, is the principle of his religious life, and the Eucharist is the bread which sustains that life.

St. Paul takes up this doctrine and makes it the subject of his teaching: “Christ dwells by faith in our hearts,”‡ he says; and “He hath shined in our hearts.”§ “I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.”|| “For to me, to live is Christ.”¶ For the great Apostle of Christ, Jesus lives in us to shape our prayers, and He gives us

* John xv. 4, 7.

† Eph. iii. 16.

|| Gal. ii. 20.

† John vi. 57.

§ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

¶ Phil. i. 21.

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His Spirit to be the soul of our religion. "The Spirit," says St. Paul, "helpeth our infirmity. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings. And He that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what the Spirit desireth; because He asketh for the saints according to God."* In order that we may better understand that this Spirit, that thus prays within us, is indeed that of Jesus Christ, he says elsewhere in his epistles: "Because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father."†

Thus, Jesus is not only our life, and therefore the principle of all our interior religious activity, but He is strictly our prayer, and He produces its aspirations and its expression within us. Our life of piety belongs to Him even more than it does to us. It is sufficiently our own for us to get the merit of it; but it so far belongs to Him that we are bound to give Him all the glory of it.

And now, in order to throw light upon this mystery of Jesus living in the Christian by means of piety, we

* Rom. viii. 26, 27.

† Gal. iv. 6.

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will borrow a comparison from St. Paul to explain at once both the nature of our relations with Christ and the wonderful union amongst all the faithful wrought by Christ.

All those who have been baptized, he says, together make up the body of Christ. Christians are the members, and Christ Himself is the head of it. Just as in a living organism order demands that all the members shall be subject to the head, and that all the members shall work in harmony to serve the head, so in the Church, Christ alone orders, and all the members obey. Christ alone makes the plans that the members carry out. Obedient to the suggestions of the same Christ, Christians are not jealous of one another; but each fulfils the part, however humble it may be, that is assigned to him.

But Christ is more than the head in the society of the faithful. He distributes life, along with the blood, to all the parts. His Spirit inspires life and movement everywhere. Every good thought, every noble feeling, and every virtuous action, proceeds from its inspiration or His grace. Is there anything greater for

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a Christian than to live thus by the Spirit of Jesus? Is any closer union amongst all the faithful conceivable than the mutual dependence in which they live as members of one body or as branches of one tree?

And what happy consequences follow from this beautiful doctrine!

Jesus, then, is the living religion both of each believer and of the whole Church. The duties which, during His mortal life, He began to carry out for His Father, these He still fulfils throughout the ages and all over the world, in the heart of each Christian and in the whole assembly of the elect. If you are bowed in adoration before God, it is He who adores His Father; if your heart is aflame with the love of God, He is Himself the burning source from which the flame proceeds; if the feeling of your own wretchedness fills you with desires and supplications, He is Himself the voice that gives them expression before God; if, in an outburst of generosity, you eagerly undertake to observe hard rules of personal sacrifice by mortifications or missionary work, it is His zeal that seeks to be accomplished in

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you. Would you not lend yourself to all His plans in regard to yourself? After having been received as a member of His sacred body, would you rebel against the head that directs you, or—what shall I say?—against the heart that gives you life? What! would Jesus meet with your resistance? In you, will He not be able to take His fill of love and respect for His Father? To give yourself up to piety is, then, to give yourself up to Jesus, adoring, praying, loving, acting, and sacrificing Himself—all this in you.

But the word that through your piety He speaks within you reverberates in the hearts of all believers who live on Him. Thanks, then, to His action in you, your prayer has, as it were, a divine echo, and its sound goes forth through all the Church. And, with a wonderful reaction, the prayers inspired by Jesus in all other Christians are repeated in your own heart, so that it is the mighty voice of the whole Church that re-echoes in you.

Such is the law of the living body. The activity of the humblest part is felt through the whole organism; but,

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in return for this, the work of the whole organism benefits the humblest of the parts.

If piety procures for the soul of the Christian this beneficent Communion of the Saints, if it evokes the ineffable joy of feeling that the least of prayers has its value for the whole Church, and that all the prayers of the Church have their value for the least of souls, this is because piety, instead of being a motion limited to one poor human heart, is the very life of Jesus Christ in a state of activity within each believer.

VI

PIETY IS AN INTERIOR LIFE

OF all forms of life, piety is the one that manifests its activity in the most inward manner. It is interior, not only in principle, but also in its effects, since, as we shall show farther on, it has for its end the transfiguration of the very faculties of the soul. Whether we consider the forces which, in piety, are set in motion towards God, or the place where God and man meet, piety seems

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to us to be an altogether interior life.

Where, then, does piety dwell? We know well that it is not in the bended knee, nor in the clasped hands, nor in the extended arms, nor in the upturned eyes, nor in the bowed head, nor in the loud protestations of the lips, although these exterior signs may be valuable aids to piety, sometimes to express it, and sometimes to stir it up. It is the soul itself that it arouses and sets in motion. Its peculiar activity begins and puts the crown on its work in the inmost recesses of the soul.

The mind gathers together all its powers of attention and fixes upon God the twofold gaze of knowledge and faith, so as to be enlightened with His light and fascinated by His glories. Imagination comes to its assistance, and, in order to sustain it, contributes a store of symbolic figures taken from all that is most majestic and beautiful in nature. The heart, once gained, is carried away with love and repentance and prayer, and with all the feelings that the memory of the past or the apprehension of the future can arouse; and these states

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of the heart, in the form of thankfulness or regret, an entire cleaving of the whole being to God, supplication and self-surrender, constitute the marrow of piety. Finally, the will obtains from this intimate intercourse the energy that gives it decision and fire; just as we see, through the action of heat, powerful engines accumulate stores of energy in readiness for work, so, in proportion as piety enkindles the heart with charity, the will becomes enriched with a capacity for action which is manifested in Christian virtues.

If such are the acts that characterize piety, is it not right to say that it is an interior life?

It is none the less this, if we consider the place where it finds its object, which is God. The God whom you seek, O Christian, when you are carried away with the impulse of piety, is not for you at the end of the long pilgrimages you undertake, nor in the word of the famous preacher whom you go to hear, nor in the sound of the organ or the choir that touch you, nor even in the books that speak of Him to you with the deepest fervour. All these external

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influences help you to find Him, only because they bid you go thither where you are least often to be found, there where He is ever waiting for you—in the depths of your own heart. “The kingdom of God is within you,” says Jesus. Hence, it is there that the meeting between your soul and God must take place. It is in this sanctuary that the ineffable union is consummated, which is the crown of piety.

Being an interior activity, piety is found to be present in proportion to the intensity of this activity. You have an interior life of union with God: hence your piety is real; and it is capable of having various degrees, but there it is. On the contrary, if this interior life is wanting in you, in the holiest exercises you experience no feeling. Then, you are not pious; your manner of life may give you the outward appearances of piety, but you get no results from it.

Nevertheless, beware of thinking that piety requires an uninterrupted strain of mind and heart. However supernatural it may be, it is also human, and consequently within the

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range of men's capacities. It is not inconsistent with inevitable distraction of mind, with being engrossed in study and in business entanglements, with the dryness and distaste engendered by custom. Simple souls, with only a glimmer of interior activity, do not lose it on that account.

It would certainly be the perfection of piety if the soul could constantly have its attention fixed upon God, and leap towards him with an impetuous bound. Towards this ideal, inaccessible as it is to our earthly weakness, each of us should strive according to the grace that has been given him.

Do not be astonished at distractions that appear to interrupt your pious activity; they are the inevitable consequence of our native infirmity. And do not be the least grieved at them, at any rate when they are involuntary; for, just as birds in flight are not constantly beating their wings, but let themselves be borne onwards smoothly by the swift impetus they have gained by vigorous exertion, so souls have alternations of interior effort and repose,

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and in these periods of repose they still gain ground in virtue from the impulse they have received. When our attention fails from mere weakness, life still goes on unhindered. Nevertheless, it is your duty to prevent, if possible, and to fight against distractions, lest they should invade the soul, and at last develop into spiritual idleness.

This invasion is most to be dreaded by those who are given to study or taken up with business. For them there is a great danger lest a life estranged from piety should be set up in their souls, and fill the whole field, and absorb all their activities. This is why, in so many, study is harmful to piety; usually, not on account of the dangerous notions it instils into their minds, but owing to the place which it increasingly occupies to the detriment of piety, which it ousts. All who are overburdened with work or business are subject to the same failure of piety. Two means must, then, be used to keep the religious life in its integrity. The first is to make our studies a subject of prayer, and to do the same with our work or our business, in our

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intercourse with God ; for in this way our piety will continue to be active in our whole being, and will sanctify all the aims that engross our interest. The second consists in renewing the thought of God in our soul from time to time, and in offering the activity that we are about to display in the duties of our calling as a sacrifice and prayer to God. For to work is to pray.

If we should happen to be tried with dryness, coldness and distaste, and if intimate intercourse with God becomes a wearisome burden to us, we should neither be alarmed nor discouraged, nor should we relax our exterior exercises. Let us not wonder if our interior activity suffers a certain amount of wear and tear ; this ill, which is an entirely material one, will be remedied with a period of rest. Also, by dint of constant repetition of the same thoughts and feelings, it is possible that the power of being moved by them may be lost ; then it will be enough to make a frequent change in our reading or our practices to revive life within us. Distaste is no danger from the suffering it entails, but only from the

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carelessness that it induces. And then it is important that, without bitterness, and with the heart left calmly in the hands of God, we should remain as faithful in our relations with Him as during the period of consolations. The interior life is not dead, but it shows no flame because it is sleeping like the fire beneath the ashes.

Among the simple, piety sometimes appears to be wanting, since they are scarcely aware of the outlines of the interior life. But make no mistake, for there are naïve and uncultured souls in whom piety attains the very highest degree. They have not the complexity of thought and feeling of those who are better educated, but their very ignorance of the things of earth enables them to fix their gaze in all its intensity on God and on the mysteries of Christ; they bring to bear upon them a mind and heart less divided, and they are less unstable, less disturbed, more filled with consolation and more faithful. It was, indeed, a simple soul, but one, nevertheless, of great interior activity, who was one day questioned by the Curé d'Ars about the many hours he spent

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in the church before God, and who answered, speaking of the Master present in the tabernacle: "I tell Him, and He tells me."

VII

PIETY HAS ITS SOURCE IN FAITH

THE Apostle St. Paul rightly says that the "just man liveth by faith,"* for the life of the Christian is nourished and expressed by piety, and it is clear that piety springs from faith as its natural source.

Everything in piety presupposes faith. He who prays abides in the presence of God, and converses with God; he gives ear to His words, reveals to Him his heart's desires, and enters into engagements with Him. But God does not make Himself perceptible to the eyes of man; faith alone can call Him forth and realize His presence as an indisputable fact. Without a living faith we can have neither prayer on our lips nor love in our hearts.

The Eucharist is the centre of our piety: all our interior attention is

* Heb. x. 38.

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concentrated on the altar, and it is at the holy table that we renew our moral energies. But to our eyes the Eucharist is no more than a little piece of bread ; it is only by faith that we can discover its ineffable riches, because faith acknowledges that Jesus Christ Himself is present in it.

And thus it is with all the sacraments, and especially with the sacrament of penance. This holy tribunal would only present to us a man in the priest who gives absolution, and merely a human consolation in the exhortations that he addresses to us, unless faith assured us that Jesus Christ lived in His priest, and that God Himself loosed the conscience by the words of absolution, and that in it the redeeming blood of Calvary purified and healed the wounds of the soul.

Therefore the life of piety cannot breathe except in the divine atmosphere of faith. If faith disappears, piety immediately dies, because it no longer has an environment in which it can exist. If faith languishes or diminishes in purity, piety suffers a like decadence, and withers like a plant deprived of air and light ; but

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if faith increases in intensity, piety revives, and blossoms and bears fruit, like corn that grows up and turns yellow during the first summer heat.

And if piety so far depends upon faith, whoever earnestly wishes to be pious must be earnest in keeping and strengthening his faith. Amongst all our favourite prayers, we should often repeat that of the Apostles, "Lord, increase our faith,"* or that of the humble centurion: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."†

Certainly faith is a favour of God; it is He who gives and preserves it. Nevertheless, man has his part in it: he obtains it by good-will, and keeps it by prudence. As soon as he draws it to him by his good desires, it is on the threshold of his soul; and if he keeps a jealous watch over it, he preserves it from all harm, and in this way, without ceasing to be God's gift, faith becomes a trophy of man's.

Faith, as the source of Christian life, must, then, be the object of constant solicitude on our part; but what zeal should we have for it if we knew what it is and what its value is

* Luke xvii. 5.

† Mark ix. 23.

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to us, the dangers that threaten it and the means of preserving it!

Regarded from within, faith is a motion of the soul towards God, an impulse of our whole being towards our Creator, an inspiration towards the light that emanates from this divine source, towards the moral strength of which He is the centre, and towards the happiness whose treasures are contained in Him. Thus understood, faith is an endeavour towards the Omnipotent, both to present to Him the homage of a creature that is dependent upon Him, and also to tell Him of the needs of a being who feels his own weakness. If this need for God were to be extinguished in us, if this inward call were to be silenced, then faith would be lost.

But the human soul, under the impulse of faith, does not cast itself into the void. The very fear of the void would be enough to stifle all religious feeling in the soul. The soul only strives towards a definite object, which it holds to be really existing, and which it would embrace. This object is contained in the Creed that it confesses. There could, then,

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be no question of faith unless there were a Creed containing the articles of faith. And as the limitations of man are too great for him to create a Creed for himself, he receives it from the religious society, the Church, which has God's authority to teach. If he wishes for a real faith, and no mere vague feeling of elevation towards the ideal, he cannot but accept the Creed proposed to him by the Church, and he must accept it in its integrity, and not refine it away with perilous subtleties; he must accept it in the same sense as the Church prescribes it to him, for fear of nullifying it by emptying it of its meaning.

So, then, to possess the faith, from which life proceeds, is to have at heart that activity which uplifts man towards God and makes him adhere faithfully to the religious dogmas of the Creed. If the heart were to be paralyzed or the Creed to fade away, in either case faith would be ruined.

But who would not dread such ruin? Could anything more harmful happen to man? If faith has the promise of the life that now is as well as the promise of the life eternal,

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does not the loss of the faith mean the loss of everything ?

Without the faith the present life is to us no more than a dark prison, and an enclosed field in which we engage in struggles that have no meaning. To him who has no outlook on eternity, and on a hereafter in which life may find its fulfilment and reward, the present life is an inexplicable enigma, an evil nightmare, and it is given over to the most brutal appetites and cannot be controlled by any moral law.

As soon as faith is wanting, hope is wanting ; but even if you have lost hope and are immured in the present, you have not succeeded in getting rid of eternity ; it remains a possibility, since so many others believe in it ; it remains a probability, since so many men of great genius have believed in it. And those who believe in it enter into no other undertaking than to live a better life in the present. You who do not believe in it lose all, since you run the risks of that eternity which perhaps exists, and since you spoil the present by ruining the vigour of resolution that the thought of eternity imparts to believers.

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Thus is eternal salvation attached to faith. The gates of eternal bliss will only open to those who have knocked at them here below.

But even in this life faith begins the happiness of the believer. It gives his mind peace as to questions of destiny that are a perpetual anguish to the human heart. With faith a man can ignore accidental things, for at least he knows what is essential, he knows himself; he knows what he is, whence he comes, and whither he is going. This knowledge ennobles him in the sight of his own conscience, because it shows him how far he is above inferior beings. Thanks to faith, he has the courage to fight against his evil instincts, and he bears suffering with patience, for he knows that his struggles with his passions or with suffering will meet with an eternal recompense hereafter. Furthermore, in this hand-to-hand contest with evil and suffering, he feels that he is not alone, for the cry then uttered by his faith obtains for him—he does not doubt it—an endowment of strength from on high.

And if such is the life imparted by

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his faith to the Christian, how can he help feeling alarmed as soon as he sees it threatened? From whatever quarter the peril may come, he fears it, and prepares to take steps against it. He is not of those imprudent people who toy with danger; he is too fearful to become the victim of his own weakness.

Since he is thoroughly persuaded that nothing better withstands morbid influences than a stoutly constituted temperament, he stirs up his faith by means of a religion that is fully alive. He knows the mutual reactions of piety and faith upon each other; he knows that, if piety springs from faith, the breath of piety arouses and develops faith. He prays that he may believe better.

In the same way, he fosters his faith by religious studies well planned. He knows that, if he feeds his mind on thoughts which are foreign or hurtful to faith, he will end by enervating or poisoning it; and this is why he takes pleasure in Holy Scripture and in the writings of religious authors, and in the science of theology.

Since he cannot escape from a world the atmosphere of which is

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impregnated with unbelief, as he inhales poison in the conversations to which he listens, and in the papers and books that he reads, and in the social environment with which he is surrounded, at least he checks as much as possible these evil communications, and protects his faith with strict vigilance.

In this way, he keeps intact the source of his piety; and his faith, preserved in its purity, enables his interior life to grow in intensity, and to be manifested outwardly in visible actions.

VIII

PIETY IS MAINTAINED BY EXTERNAL EXERCISES

ALTHOUGH life is an interior activity, it would perish if it remained concentrated within us; its flame would soon be put out, if it were shut in a closed vessel and deprived of air. Moreover, what is the sign by which you recognize that a creature is alive? If it moves and feeds, you say it lives. And, further, acting and eating seem to be not only signs of life, but also necessary con-

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ditions for its preservation ; without motion and food, all life ceases.

And it is the same with piety—external exercises are indispensable to its maintenance. On the ground that it is an interior activity, do not so far relegate it within that nothing of it appears outside ; that would quickly bring it to naught. Be sure that external regularity in piety, however edifying it may be, has not for its object the attraction of the attention of others so much as the awakening and nourishment in yourself of the religious life, and beware of the fatal delusion of making any reduction in your visible acts of religion.

If you have at heart an ardent faith, you will not be able to bury it there. It is overflowing by nature, and it needs signs of outward expression. The more it is alive within, the more it will break forth outwardly. In your best impulses of piety, when the love of God fires your heart with most ardour, you have knelt down and stretched out your arms towards the crucifix, you have gone to prostrate yourself before the tabernacle, you have passed hours of meditation in the silent corner of a church, and you

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have perhaps uttered burning words. Every time an impetus of life has been felt in your soul, there has inevitably sprung from it, as out of some deep spring, manifestations that could not be repressed. Give, then, free course to such effusions of piety; for in thus overflowing, in addition to the joy with which it inundates you, it increases in intensity.

The external acts of piety are very rightly called exercises. The good that is done to the life of the body by physical exercises, spiritual exercises effect in the same way for the life of the soul. All living powers are increased by action. You would, then, condemn your soul to progressive atrophy, if you deprived it of the good of daily exercises; and, on the contrary, you will develop and strengthen it, if you stir up your faculties with the acts of religion. The more you pray, the more will you get a taste and aptitude for prayer; the more regular you are in pious reading, the more will you feel a holy activity in doing it; the more faithful you are in following the sacred offices of the Church, the more you will love them. To omit from distaste a certain part

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of the exercises of piety is to run the risk of soon doing without them altogether, and wisdom bids us rather to overcome the first attacks of interior weariness by still greater diligence. In the same way as in the depths of the winter energetic motion imparts a glow to limbs frozen with cold, because it thoroughly stirs the vitality within, so, when desolated with spiritual cold, the violent fulfilment of the motions and exercises of piety awakens the life of the soul and restores its fervour. Therefore, during periods of languor make use of the remedy recommended by experience and common sense.

Moreover, these languors are usually brought about by a want of interior nourishment, for there are more souls than one would suppose who, in the service of God, let themselves die of hunger. Bread is within their reach, both the bread of supernatural grace and that of human help, but they do not make use of it. But the great good of pious exercises faithfully fulfilled is just this, that they feed the soul with the spiritual bread that is necessary to its life.

In return for the sacrifices that you

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undertake in order to make room for your spiritual exercises amidst your occupations, and to pray in spite of your dryness, God recompenses you with an increase of grace. During the hours that you spend, even in aridity, beneath the eyes of the Father, His gifts fall upon you like a blessed rain that waters and makes you bear fruit. By the holy inspirations that He gives you, by the pious readings in which you spend your time, and by the spiritual instructions that you go to hear, He sheds upon you His light, and He stirs within you the glow of His love. All these are benefits of which you would have been deprived, if you had omitted your exercises by neglect. Say not that all this is a loss of time, for during the hours you devote to Him, even if they yield no consolation, God sows in your soul seeds which contain in germ the harvests of the future.

May these motives make you resolve on the faithful observance of the exercises which a wise director would prescribe to one in your position !

It is not a good thing for such

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exercises to take up the whole of the day, nor even the greater part of your time. For you have the duties of your state to fulfil, and you must remember that the duties of your state ought not to come between you and God. Even if you were sufficiently at leisure to give all your time to piety, you ought not to be advised to do it. It would, indeed, be a bad thing for your mind to be always on the strain; if it had not long intervals of rest, it would end by breaking down or becoming dulled. Moreover, the thought of God will follow you amidst your work, and even if it were to become unconscious and entirely virtual, its impulse will, nevertheless, be the force that will guide you.

You will, then, take a reasonable time for your exercises of piety. What is it to be? You will fix it according to the leisure left you by the duties of your state.

If you are a religious, whether living in community or not, you will first of all fulfil in their integrity the exercises prescribed for you in your rule; for it is to their strict observance that for you divine grace is attached. But since nothing better

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arouses our activity than the acts that we do spontaneously, you will add to the exercises of the rule some personal exercises, even if they only be a few minutes of prayer or of reading, so that their initiative may be in the eyes of God a testimony of your generosity.

If you are living in the world, but with a firm resolve to live a life of piety in it, your regulations will include some daily vocal prayers, such as the morning and evening prayer and the recitation of the rosary; some mental prayers, such as meditative prayer and visits to the Blessed Sacrament; pious reading for at least a quarter of an hour in some ascetical work; and, above all, the Sacraments of Penance and of the Holy Eucharist, Holy Mass and Holy Communion, will be the essential acts of religion, towards which all the other exercises should converge as a constant preparation.

If you are one of those, who are so numerous in our modern society, whose hours are wholly consumed with intercourse and business, your religious exercises will be certainly very curtailed; nevertheless, you will

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set aside during the day a few scarcely noticeable moments, not less religiously observed than the times for meals, during which you will devote yourself to the business of your soul and to the worship of God. To you, also, the treasures of piety may be opened, but on the following conditions: morning and evening you will pray upon your knees; twice a day you will enter into your conscience for a few seconds, in the morning to arrange the order of your time, and in the evening to examine the use you have made of it; not a single day will pass without your giving a few minutes to feed your heart and mind on some good religious reading; and, lastly, amidst all your occupations, you will carry with you the thought of God and the desire to be kind to your fellow-men. Such a limited scheme is within the reach of those who are most taken up with business. Happy are they if, in addition thereto, and to attending Mass on Sundays and Feast-days, they are able also to hear Mass and say the rosary daily.

Note, in conclusion, that this regularity in pious exercises demands as

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much flexibility as delicacy. If it requires exactitude, still, there must be no rigidity. Just as negligence would be harmful, so inflexibility would be out of place. A duty of one's state of life must always take precedence of an exercise of piety, and often a deed of charity will have to come first. For, if we consider rightly, we only cultivate piety in order to be virtuous and good; and it would be to do an injury to piety if we were to put it before the end it has in view.

IX

PIETY REQUIRES MORTIFICATION

AS the stone falls towards the centre of gravity, and as the compass points towards the magnetic pole, so the soul of man, as soon as it is free, takes its bearings towards God, and goes straight to Him by means of piety. It is, indeed, of importance to increase the power of the inward attraction that draws us towards God, but it is still more necessary to set our souls free from the ties that hinder our impulses and

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check our steps. For we are captives, and it is our moral chains that fetter our piety. Do we really altogether mean to be pious? Then we must work for our deliverance. The virtue which has the effect of liberating the soul is called mortification.

There are two degrees of mortification: it is, first of all, a deliverance, and afterwards it may become a holocaust. Its first object is to establish within us the rule of God over our passions that have been subdued; and so far as this all are bound to it, if they make any pretence of living as virtuous Christians. When it has once subdued a man to God, it is able to sacrifice to His glory the flesh that has been already brought under control, and the soul that is subjected to obedience; but this immolation of the Carmelite or the Carthusian remains optional: for instance, however excellent the maceration of the body may be, it is not obligatory.

It is of mortification as a means of deliverance that Jesus says: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me;"* and again: "What

* Matt. xvi. 24.

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doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul ?”* And St. Paul gives a very definite commentary on these words when he says : “ If you live according to the flesh, you shall die. But if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live”.† Mortification, then, kills the germs of death, and therefore it gives the seeds of life favourable conditions for development. The life of piety, which is both the principle and the fruit of the divine activity within us, could not therefore subsist and grow without mortification.

Since it is admitted that piety is a free and ready impulse of love towards God, a soul will only be really pious if it has broken with all external hindrances and removed those that are within. It is the work of mortification to accomplish this twofold deliverance.

What piety can you expect to find in a soul that is dissipated and engrossed in things external ? God is not to be met with in the squares of the town ; He only gives Himself to those who look for Him in their own hearts.

* Matt. xvi. 26.

† Rom. viii. 13.

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How often, perchance, has it happened to you to go out of yourself through curiosity ! Your eyes, being open to all the sights around you, wanted to see everything, to feast to the full on every novelty, and to stop in front of every picture ; your ears, eager to hear everything, listened to every tale, incited people to backbiting, if not to calumny, and became the receptacle of every rumour in the world around you ; your steps were bent in the direction of ribald and frivolous company, and wherever it was impossible to reflect upon oneself. And, at the same time, in your vanity you tried to attract the attention of others, and, for this end, you displayed in your outward appearance and in your words all that could give you some personal merit ; and hence, you were not at all anxious about having some real worth within, provided that you were able by some tawdry outward glitter to catch the eye. Lastly, your sensuous feeling was easily captured in the snare of vulgar pleasure and worldly attachments ; you took to the world in order to get more enjoyments, and your heart became entangled in a net, the meshes

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of which it could not break through. And do you think that a soul, so far an absentee from itself, so fast a prisoner in a foreign land, can go to meet its God and run towards Him? No; for certainly, in such a state piety is impossible.

If, however, you have good desires, begin by entering within yourself. Gather together your scattered powers, your mind, your heart, your imagination and your senses; break the bonds that keep you a captive—I do not say the bonds of your business affairs and of your just connections, but the chains that weigh so heavily on your hands and feet. This breaking away, this brave recapture of yourself, will be your first act of mortification; and the second will be the vigilance you will show in not letting yourself go again. Your eyes will be veiled with a modesty and caution that will not allow them to be the open doors by which your soul was wont to run far away from you. Your ears, too, will be discreet, chaste, and closed to news from without; you will no longer make a foolish display of yourself in your clothes and speech, and you will be

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more anxious to be than to appear ; you will make a sacrifice of things that gratify the senses, and you will ever have a hand upon your heart ready to protect it from robbers. It is upon these conditions that you will be at home with yourself. By mortification piety will become possible to you.

Nevertheless, you have not yet accomplished the conquest of yourself. For when you have been set free from things external, you will still have to escape slavery within. Alas ! man is not always at liberty even in his own house ; indeed, I believe that the reason that so many people like to wander away from their own hearts is because the heart itself is a harder tyrant to them than all the external masters whose yoke they bear. This is why interior mortification is so important ; but its object is so subtle that it is hard to grasp, and so difficult that it requires the exertion of more strength to gain it.

Have you not felt that your flesh is a capricious slave ? Sometimes it is heavy and idle, sometimes, on the contrary, weak and incapable of effort. When well fed, it rebels ;

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when too starved, it becomes refractory. When its ill-regulated appetites are awakened, what humiliations, what dangers, what anguish of conscience, what obsessions of the imagination! Its coarse appeals are sometimes so noisy that the pure voices of sanctity are, as it were, stifled by them. And add to this the vile suggestions of over-susceptibility and jealousy — over - susceptibility, that inner outbreak of wounded pride, which makes us believe that people have been wanting in regard for us, and that they have trespassed upon what is due to us, and that they cherish perverse purposes against us; jealousy, that secret poison of the heart, made of the vexation we feel at the merit or success of others. And yet, I say nothing about the selfish ambition that only regards the world with reference to itself, which is aggravated by the happiness of others as if it were a personal calamity, which will be responsible for nothing to anybody, which demands everything for itself—pleasure, honour, wealth, and power.

Such is a rapid survey of the enemies that contend for our soul.

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The Saints have felt no less than you the interior conflicts between the manifold passions of humanity. St. Paul complains of them even with bitterness. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* he asks. "My grace is sufficient for thee,"† was the answer, as if the Spirit of God had said to him: "Thou shalt not destroy it, but by My grace thou shalt bring it under thy rule." And we well know that it was by mortification that the great Apostle won the mastery over himself and established order and peace in his own heart; for he makes this confession: "I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection."‡

And you, too, will rule yourselves by mortification. You will treat your flesh as a slave who is not to be flattered or maltreated; you will keep it in a proper equilibrium. If it is subject to evil inclinations, you will administer correction until it has learned to obey; but you will carefully avoid reading, sights, reveries and conversation, which might arouse

* Rom. vii. 24.

† Rom. vii. 25; 2 Cor. xii. 9.

‡ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

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it with terrible awakenings. In proportion as you bridle the flesh, the interior passions will grow weaker. You will, however, keep watch over your heart, in order to stifle them in their beginnings. Jealousy will get no hold upon you, if you are large-hearted enough to thank God for the welfare of your brothers; sensitiveness will not lead you to fire up in anger, if kind-heartedness enables you to take the doings of others in good part; and, lastly, selfishness will be trampled underfoot, if you can forget yourself and not expect anything from anybody, and if you cultivate in yourself the desire to be of service.

This interior mortification, which brings forth the moral life or the life of holiness, is only acquired by degrees; and as it grows, it enables the soul to start on its upward flight. A little of such mortification makes piety already easier, and when piety has gained more activity, it imparts more energy for mortification. And thus, by the mutual reaction of favourable influences, mortification and piety combined help the Christian to advance in the love and possession of God.

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X

PIETY IS SUSTAINED BY ITS OWN PROGRESS

IT has been rightly said that, "in the way of God, not to go forward is to go back." This rule is all the more certain because it is not peculiar to piety, but it is a general law in all things here below. In the same way as iron gets rusty if it is not often rubbed, and as a house falls into dilapidation and ruin if it is not periodically renewed, so all living creatures visibly fall away and incline towards death as soon as their activity ceases growing in strength. Life, in fact, is a constant struggle with death. The victory of life is called progress, the sting of death produces decadence. No stable equilibrium can possibly be realized ; we must go forward or back.

The life of piety, which is an interior impulse of love for God, does not escape this stern law. On the path that leads to God there is no stage where it can stay and sit down. On this steep slope there is no resting-place ; either one ascends, while the

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will is active, or else one goes down, as soon as the will relaxes. For this ascent of the soul towards God is like the upward flight of birds towards the sky: as soon as their wings cease to beat the air, they fall merely by their own weight.

Experience has too often shown that piety is only maintained by progress. The world affords daily sad examples of this. Here we see a pious person who was regular in prayer, in daily meditation and in frequent Communion, and this daily contact with God transfigured his soul. He was reserved, prudent, kindly, charitable, forgetful of self, and diffused the kindness of God wherever he went. But, either from weariness or distaste, or it may be through being overwhelmed with business or worldly attractions, he fell off in prayer, gave up meditation, made his Communions without fervour, abandoned the habit of reading good books, and at once he became thoughtless, his conscientiousness became dulled, selfishness gained the upper hand and his character became embittered and exacting; he ceased to be a living image of

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God through ceasing to approach Him.

Would to God that such falls were unknown among priests and religious! Can it be possible that in the cloister, where heroic wills, in an outburst of noble audacity, have buried richly endowed characters, such breakdowns grieve the divine heart? It is not because all the duties of piety are not fulfilled with regularity; but if life dies away in such a complete setting, or if men sink into an idle drowsiness, the externals of piety will not preserve the soul from the fatal encroachment of death. Such a situation is lamentable, and all the more so on account of the flagrant contradiction between the life actually led and that which is openly professed: a permanent and conscious lie that vexes the soul and falsifies the character at the fountain-head. It is impossible to say how much and how far, in a community, uninterrupted progress in piety is of importance for the joy and virtue of individuals, and for the proper harmony of all the members of the same religious body.

And in what ought this necessary

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progress in the paths of piety to consist ?

It does not consist in the multiplication of hours explicitly devoted to prayer, for the mind is incapable of a progressively increasing strain ; it cannot concentrate itself upon God to any good effect unless it avoids overwork and fatigue. Furthermore, it is not the object of piety to hinder the duties of one's state of life ; on the contrary, it aims at fulfilling them still more completely, by drawing moral strength from God Himself. It is, indeed, quite possible that the duties of one's state, with their increasing demands, may temporarily encroach upon the hours of piety, and yet the duty of sustaining it by means of fresh progress will always be an obligation.

The progress of piety is to be measured, not by the time spent upon it, but by the intensity of the interior life that it develops, and by the real influence that it bears upon conduct.

Take the case of a man engaged in manifold occupations, but determined, nevertheless, to lead a life of piety. He is able to give only a

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limited amount of time to exterior exercises, but, since he holds such exercises to be indispensable, the hours that he devotes to them are sacred to him, so that he takes the most energetic means not to be deprived of them. Through the daily triumphs achieved by piety in maintaining itself in spite of hindrances, it increases the intensity of its life, not to mention the readings and prayers and inspirations, which are the constant nourishment furnished by its faithfulness.

To him who takes so much pains to meet Him, God does not deny Himself, and to seek Him with such zeal is to become possessed of Him at the start. The union achieved in external exercises, even if it were disturbed by distractions, continues all day long. Just as Moses, coming down from Sinai, bore signs of His intercourse with God in the rays of light that shone from his countenance, so the pious soul carries away from its exercises into the midst of its work the splendours of faith and the ardour of divine love. The thought of God is its companion and guide, the strength of God gives it

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courage in action and resolute resignation in suffering. And the cultivation of the thought of God must be the aim of piety; this is the most unequivocal sign of its progress.

Still, it has to make this thought bear fruit; for, if it is a good thing to have one's attention fixed upon God, it is still better to offer Him one's service. St. Vincent de Paul, indeed, reached this apogee of piety when he asked himself before doing anything: "What does God wish me to do? What advice does He wish me to give? What step does He wish me to take?" This dependence, especially if it imparts no hardness to what one does, is supremely holy. It presupposes and preserves recollection in the soul, and it protects it from precipitation, and helps it to keep itself completely in hand, and it submits the whole of one's life to the pure influences of the Christian faith. It is then that we see realized the Apostle's word, which we have already quoted as the highest expression of piety: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me."*

* Gal. ii. 20.

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XI

THE DETERIORATION OF PIETY

THE sweetest fruits are those that are most prone to go off, and their loss is the most to be deplored. Now, amongst all the fruits of the interior activity of the soul, there is none that is better than piety, none that brings more gladness, none that provides a more substantial food; but, at the same time, there is none so prone to deteriorate and change its sweetness afterwards into poison. It is, then, proper to know the kind of deterioration to which it is subject, and to guard it from the dangers that threaten it.

The first danger incurred by persons in religion is the reduction of their piety to forms or exterior practices. However worthy of respect the practices may be, they do not constitute piety itself; for piety is a life that reveals itself within. The exterior acts are the necessary stimulus and the visible expression of it, and when they have set it in motion, they have fulfilled the part they have to play; if they did not awaken it, and especi-

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ally, if such were not their tendency, they would be sterile.

Jesus put His disciples on their guard against this fault when He said: "When you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard. Be not you therefore like to them, for your Father knoweth what is needful for you, before you ask Him."* These admirable words well reveal to us what prayer is. We do, indeed, require a form for our lips—not at all in order to reveal our wretchedness to God, for He knows it better than ourselves; but a form to arouse our own feeling, and to put our hearts in a state of active supplication.

So, then, they leave the true path of piety who multiply to excess vocal prayers and pick up every known form of devotion and make a duty of reciting it daily, without taking care to keep alive the spirit of prayer in the soul: they risk wearing out the mind, if they do not incur a distaste for religion. They also leave it who consider themselves pious because they make innumerable pilgrimages and

* Matt. vi. 7, 8.

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belong to innumerable confraternities, or because they wear a number of religious emblems. There is certainly no harm in these visible signs in themselves, which may be valuable as a stimulus, but in the persuasion that piety consists entirely in doing such things.

In the same way, what can be better than the Divine Office and the liturgical ceremonies? Does not God wish us, above all, through these to enter into possession of His life? And, nevertheless, it comes about that, in consequence of mere routine not well struggled against, these exercises may become a withered bark that no longer enshrines life. They have an appearance of piety, especially when they take up several hours of the day; but they have not the reality, and they do not yield its fruits. How many priests and religious think that they have enough piety provided that every day is full of exercises! What more can you ask, say they? What God requires, in addition to the bodily presence and the motion of the lips, is presence of spirit and activity of soul. When this inner ferment is lacking, can it be wondered at, if, in spite of

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the religious habit, words and conduct are so devoid of God ?

Interior piety, in its turn, is subject to deviations. In ill-balanced minds it may lead to sentimentalism and illuminism.

Far be it from us to cast aside the sensible joys, which, to pious souls, especially to those living in community, are the just recompense of their efforts. God is the controller of the effusion of His grace ; when He pleases to let souls taste His goodness by means of consolations, it would be an unwelcome proceeding on man's part to refuse His gifts. But, according to the subtle remark of St. Francis of Sales, though it is important "to seek the God of consolations, it is not a duty to seek the consolations of God." It would, then, be an error, and a fault as well, to cultivate piety for the sake of the sensible satisfaction expected from it, and to use it to stir up impressions which are more likely to soothe the nerves than to fortify the will. In those who are greedy for such emotions, it is the sensuous side of the disposition that is developed, and not the religious life. This is why piety dis-

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appears as soon as the senses have grown dull with habit and enjoyment has vanished, just as a plant with shallow roots dries up under the first heat of the sun.

If a sentimental sort of piety remains, it soon falls into a still graver evil, illuminism.

Perhaps you have known people of delicate nerves, predisposed by ill-health to every kind of over-excitement, who cannot find the way to learn wisdom in the occupations of their state of life, and who abandon themselves to all the delights of a religious obsession; they imagine that God favours them with His intercourse without stint; they see Him, they receive His messages, and they are thus fed up with phantoms and visions. These are the victims of illuminism, sick souls deserving all pity, and often incurable, who are only able to find relief in the strict obligations of practical life. Such unfortunate beings cannot be undeceived too quickly, before they have become the victims of their delusions. Let them be well persuaded that God speaks to the soul by the ordinary means of faith, and not by extra-

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ordinary favours, and let them show a humble distrust of everything that makes them leave the common path.

Pride is the greatest danger of piety. Certainly we know that pride is natural to the human heart ; but, at any rate, it should use piety as a remedy, and not as its food. But there are men who make their piety an instrument of vanity and a cause of foolish self-satisfaction to themselves—an ostentatious piety, that dies of its own abuse.

It is to the vain, who make an ostentatious display of piety, that Jesus speaks the words: “And when ye pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men: Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.”* For piety does not look for the notice of man, indeed, but for the notice and possession of God. But God is not to be found in

* Matt. vi. 5, 6.

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the public squares : He is in the heart of the Christian. And in order to enter into his own heart to visit the God who dwells therein, the Christian flies far from the noisy throng ; he loves the shadowy solitudes, the depths of the woods, the dim corners of the churches, the mystery he can find in his own room. The more he isolates himself, the more he finds God. What does it matter to him if the world ignores his piety ? This ignorance is even a protection to him. His good is in being alive, not in other people seeing him live.

The proud self-satisfaction that some religious take in their piety has been admirably described by Jesus in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The Pharisee stood up and prayed, saying : " O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican. I fast twice in a week : I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican standing afar off would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven ; but struck his breast saying : O God, be merciful to me a sinner."* The

* Luke xviii. 11-13.

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word of this despised publican, who was ashamed of himself—this word is the prayer and the true sign of piety, the cry of a living soul conscious of its wretchedness. But, alas! are there not a good many Pharisees among us? How many there are who take refuge in their so-called piety to dispense themselves from the duty of living a good life! This man is harsh to his brethren, exacting in his ways, severe in his speech for the slightest defects of his neighbour; he is not in the least careful about his use of his time, nor as to the progress of his soul, nor as to the employment he makes of his powers. What does it matter? Is he not pious? Is he not regular in all his exercises? Others, overwhelmed and distraught by the whirl of business, are only infidels compared to him. He bears himself witness that he is a saint: "I am not as one of the publicans," he says, in speaking of men of the world. And whilst, proud Pharisee that he is, he does not see that his piety is entirely superficial, and that his life is no better for it, God looks down with kindness and mercy on those who work and suffer, and who, without

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spending a long time in exercises, deeply yearn after God and are full of feelings of kindness towards their fellows.

This pharisaical delusion, which is too common amongst those who make a profession of piety, would be quickly dissipated, if only they were persuaded that piety is made for living and not life for piety, and that piety is only to be esteemed in so far as it makes life better. To isolate religion from life is to lower it and to smite it with impotence; there is here, then, a new kind of deterioration, against which piety must be on its guard.

PART II

THE FRUITS OF PIETY

XII

PIETY AIMS AT MAKING US BETTER

THE heathen never thought of religion as a means of moral perfection. They went to their gods to appease them, and not to imitate them. These gods were too vicious to be imitated, and the worship paid to them was often a defilement to the soul. Paganism, then, left a stout partition in man's heart between religion and life.

Amongst the Jews, though they had the true worship of God, the pagan tendency was nevertheless felt. It was also vigorously combated by their prophets, who wished to see religion not only on the lips, but also in heart and hand. "This people honoureth Me with their lips, but

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their heart is far from Me.”* Such is the reproach of Jehovah to His people. In the eyes of the true God, worship is vain, if it does not sanctify thought and deed.

This mutual interdependence between religion and morality is definitely consecrated by Christianity. Jesus came to purify and restore the religion of His Father; but He understands it as being a means of moral progress. “Be you therefore perfect,” He says, “as also your heavenly Father is perfect.”† “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me.”‡ After teaching us, in the *Pater noster*, to ask God for the pardon of our sins, He immediately adds: “For if you will forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. But if you forgive not men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences.”§ He warns us that without goodness piety is barren, when He says: “Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will

* Mark vii. 6.

† Matt. v. 48.

‡ John xiv. 21.

§ Matt. vi. 14, 15.

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of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to Me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and cast out devils in Thy name, and done many miracles in Thy name? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, you that work iniquity.”* These words are very significant; the Author of our religion Himself teaches us that our religion is mere trickery, if it does not succeed in making our life better.

And His disciples preach the same doctrine. See with what severity St. Paul judges those who, in their piety, neglect the duties of their state of life. “If any man,” he says, “have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”† The Apostle St. James, for his part, insists upon this capital truth: “For even as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.”‡ “Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless

* Matt. vii. 21-23.

† 1 Tim. v. 8.

‡ Jas. ii. 17, 26.

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and widows in their tribulation: and to keep oneself unspotted from this world."*

This, the authentic teaching of religion, gathered by tradition and faithfully handed down to us, makes piety, both for individuals and for society, an instrument of moral progress. It has been given to man as a power from on high, in order that, by means of it, he may become better, and that, by means of goodness, he may be happier in this world and assured of bliss in eternity. Religion and morality, piety and holiness, are then indissolubly united by God. A piety that seeks anything else than an increase in goodness, mistakes its end; a piety that would be its own end would be barren and rejected by God. If goodness could exist without piety, God would assuredly take more pleasure in it than in piety without goodness.

Here we touch the very heart of Christianity: here is the moral mark that characterizes it. If this fundamental law fell into oblivion, it would go off in smoke.

The closer this alliance between

* Jas. i. 27.

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piety and religion becomes, the more will religion gain in consistency, and the more will it acquire prestige and influence. Hence, the fate of Christianity is in the hands of those who profess and preach it: they will ruin it where it is without virtue; they will implant it and cause it to prosper wherever it shows that it is a moral force.

Therefore, it is seriously distorted, if it is limited in its action to temporal advantages. For there are Christians so ill-instructed as to the true character of their religion as to look to it for nothing beyond benefits of a material nature. If prayer does not bring rain upon their fields when it is needed, or if it does not prevent strokes of misfortune; if prayer does not get for the labourer out of work the employment he desires, or if it does not procure for every family in distress the bread for which it hungers; if prayer does not cure all the illnesses of those who are dear to us and secure us from the hand of death, what can be the good of it? and what is the use of religion to man? With such a spirit as this, prayer is not addressed to God except

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under the pressure of some apprehension; then recourse is had to the forms that are recommended as infallible receipts according to circumstances. And this perverted religion, without calling forth a single interior act of love for God, looks for all success from the magical influence of a recited formulary, or a lighted candle, or a medal or a scapular.

It is not that God does not care for our temporal needs. He makes provision for them by His providence; and sometimes He condescends to signalize His intervention by striking acts that we rightly call miracles, so that we have good reason to fly to Him in our necessities. Nor does He at all disapprove of the external signs by which we express our desires, provided that superstition does not transform them into pagan practices. But all this is not religion: it is only its rind—a rind that is worth keeping so long as it contains, and does not stifle, religion.

Religion, particularly in its most active form, which is piety, is the ascent to God of the soul that confides in the divine power. Under this impulse the soul is uplifted and puri-

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fied, and becomes more worthy of the God to whom it draws near; the grace of God penetrates it, ennobles it, transforms it and fortifies it. After being made better in all respects by this happy communion, it returns to earth better equipped amidst its temporal interests. It is enough if God have changed the soul, without changing the circumstances in which it lives, for it to find everything altered. It has more courage to turn its powers and capacities to account, and to conquer in the struggle for existence; temporary defeats do not beat down its energy or prevent its recovery of self-possession, so that it can set to work once more. It remains in firmness and resignation to face the evils that it cannot get rid of, and it makes use even of its sufferings to help on its moral progress. Such effects, which are the fruits of religion, are surely worth more to men than the transitory benefit of some earthly gain. Would that Christians always sought in their piety for this inestimable good!

If every kind of distortion of piety is to be avoided, it must also be prevented from becoming barren. It is

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sterile in those who ask for nothing from it, and who also get no profit out of it. It is a loss to them, if the time and the strength they spend in pious exercises yields them no return. Although it were to be regretted, we might put up with the purely personal harm, for which they themselves alone are responsible, if it did not turn to the grave detriment of religion itself. For piety falls into contempt among men, when it appears empty and unfruitful in those who practise it.

The world knows you for a man of faith and piety. It knows that you attend church, that you receive the sacraments, that you read religious books day by day, that you have taken up certain devotions, and that your name is in the front rank in confraternities and associations for good works. But the world has its eye on you, and takes note of all you do. It sees that you give up none of the pleasures of your position, that you are proud when you are out, harsh and bad-tempered at home, and that your tongue utters bitter and poisonous things; your passions are stormy and not at all under control, and your virtue is not above sus-

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picion. Then, what is the use of piety? What difference is there between you, who make a profession of it, and unbelievers, who speak against it? What result has the grace of Baptism had in your case? What strength do you get from prayer? If only you were more frank, more just, more gentle, more charitable, more generous and more mortified than other men, they would say that these graces in you were the triumphant wonder of your piety. But see to what scorn you expose it, when your life shows that it has not made you better.

Just as saints bring honour to God, so do people whose piety is sterile lower Him in the thoughts of men. It is not that piety is able, all at once, to raise a soul to the height of virtue, but that, where it is sincere and active, it at any rate puts it in the way of perfection. But who has not observed that men judge one another, not by the position in which they actually are, but by the direction in which they are going? As long as our course is toward that which is better, our life will testify to truth and to the value of our piety.

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XIII

PIETY GIVES STRENGTH TO THE WILL

PIETY is merely illusory when it accommodates itself to every moral weakness. The distinctive mark of true piety is progress in goodness—at least, in the endeavour towards what is better. Between genuine piety and real virtue there is, then, a bond in their very nature.

This union is so close, that virtue and piety afford the same stages of growth and falling away. Here is a man upon whose heart piety has taken a strong hold, so that the thought of God encircles him, the love of God fires him, and the exercises of religion are his necessary food. Watch his conduct, and you will see that at the same time he shows more self-control, he is more gentle, more devoted, more ready for sacrifice and more generous in his work. In proportion as his piety increases, his virtue grows, and if both continue to yield each other mutual aid, he will get the immense charity of a St. Vincent de Paul, or

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the insatiable zeal of a St. Francis Xavier. But if, after an impulse of fervour, his piety begins to decrease, if it is dissipated and fails from his heart, together with an abandonment of his religious exercises, you will at once find that all the springs of his life become relaxed. In proportion as piety lowers, his virtue goes by degrees, and the man is like a disabled ship amidst the eddies of passion; he becomes selfish, exacting, touchy, cross, and unfaithful to the duties of his state of life; and then it is clear that his virtue depended only upon his piety.

This experience, which has been observed hundreds of times by those who are pious, both in their own case and in the case of others, shows what a profound influence is exercised by piety upon the will. For if virtue be the fruit of grace, it is also a product of the will, and it depends for its merit upon the conscious part played by the will. A virtuous action gets its supernatural character from grace, but it is because it is also the work of the will that it belongs to a man, and is of value to him. It is, then, by acting upon the will, and by im-

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printing upon it a moral impulse, that piety engenders virtue.

But in what way can piety have a direct action upon the will? To see this clearly, let us recall the nature and the conditions of the activity of this master-faculty in man.

The will is an interior force that carries us towards the good. Its activity is manifested at first within, but it must spring forth and spread itself without. Its interior effort consists in the firm decision by which we determine to act rightly. But this determination must be energetic enough to issue in outward action and to last. It is like a spring which has been strongly wound up and is set loose, thus transmitting to a distance the power which it has stored up. Or it may be still better compared to a motor, full of accumulated energy, which it expends in work.

Only, the case of the will is like an engine driven by steam. However complete and well constructed it may be, it is not always ready to act. Clear ideas are not enough for it, just as a knowledge of machinery is not enough to set a motor going. And, just as in the motor, steam under

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pressure is required for action, so the will must possess a certain amount of heat of feeling to come into play. If we know how to awaken and to enkindle feeling in the soul, we then have the secret of moving the will.

Now, these are the conditions that cause an awakening of the feelings: recollection, which makes its appeal to all the powers of the soul and keeps them under control within; the contemplation of some powerful truth, which is capable of moving the heart by the continuous action of its illumination; the interior impulse by which the soul stirs itself up and urges itself to action; and, lastly, the external influences that blow upon the fuel within and stir it into flame.

It is now easy to understand the assistance given by piety to the will; it exactly realizes the conditions in which feeling takes its rise, the inner and indispensable spring of the will.

We have already said that recollection is required to begin with; but this is just the first law of piety. Piety is incompatible with distraction of mind. It bids man withdraw as much as possible from the sounds and preoccupations of the world; it

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invites him to enter into himself, for it is only within his own heart that he can find God, if he would pray to Him. However busy he may be, he ought to have hours set apart in which he will belong to none but God and himself. By piety faithfully practised, the Christian stores up fuel from which the flame may spring to fire his energies.

And, next, there must be the continued contemplation of some powerful truth. But here, again, piety demands, during the times for recollection, meditation on religious truths. Now, everyone knows that, of all the objects of knowledge, the most serious and the most impressive for the soul, the most independent of race and time, those that move the heart to its profoundest depths, are afforded to us by religion. Whether these truths appear in their living reality in the lives of the Saints or in the mysteries of Christ, whether they be manifested as a revelation of our destiny or as a code of moral obligation, they never leave us dead and cold. Reason, no doubt, is not without urgent considerations; but religious motives

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are always still greater, more universal, and stamped with a higher authority. The convictions that flow from them, revived and renewed daily by piety, pass into the state of habit; they keep the heart at its full strength, and, hence, feeling gains a really active power in the soul. Can anyone fall into idleness, for instance, if several times a day he comes face to face with the truth that God has created him for action, and that, if he wastes his time, he is wasting his life, both in this world and for eternity?

Further, what an interior movement occurs in the soul, when the heart admonishes and stirs itself to do better by frequent exercises of piety! For piety is not satisfied with barren contemplation. As soon as it has brought us face to face with some important truth, it insists on our comparing our moral state with our ideal. This examination of conscience produces confusion and yearning, never discouragement. Then prayer rises up—ardent prayer which is an impulse of the whole being towards the good, a panting aspiration towards God. What warmth there is in the soul! What a stirring

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of the will ! What generosity of resolution !

Lastly, piety carefully arranges our external influences. It creates about us, by means of all the signs that it brings to our notice, an atmosphere of warmth and comfort. By the reading it suggests to us, by the instruction to which it compels us, by the personal admonitions and influences that it procures for us, it fastens our attention, provokes our activity, and even stimulates our sensibility. So many rays focussed from every side on the centre of our souls raise its heat to the point at which it becomes a powerful energy in the hands of the will.

Considered thus, piety already realizes the human conditions in which the will is stirred. However human these conditions may be, they are none the less a grace from God, for, in giving us His grace, God means, first of all, to make us act according to the requirements of our nature.

But His grace goes further still : it is a help which is fundamentally imperceptible by human observation, and known only by means of Christian

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faith. This grace prepares the act of will by the supernatural light that it imparts; it determines it by the force that it communicates to it; and it carries it to completion by means of the divine gift of perseverance. This grace is the fruit of piety, for God gives it to whosoever asks for it in prayer, and to whosoever is in the proper disposition to receive it through recollection and mortification.

Piety is, then, for the will, the best source of its energy, and since it is the will, above all, that gives man his value, piety is for him of inestimable price.

XIV

PIETY EXPANDS AND RULES THE HEART

PIETY does not leave the heart indifferent, since it is by touching the heart that it moves the will. But the heart is not only capable of being moved: it is, by nature, a power of loving. Does piety afford it, so far as this is concerned, full satisfaction? It is a calumny against piety to say that it makes the heart narrow

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and cold. The truth is, that it expands the heart while regulating it.

How could piety close the heart to pure affections, since it is in itself an impulse of love? Would it really be a life if it did not turn to love, since the Apostle St. John warns us that "he that loveth not, abideth in death"?* Moreover, He who is its source willed that the first word of His commandment should be "Thou shalt love;"† and when He came among men in the person of Jesus Christ, He said that His commandment was—love. To the need of love, created by His hands in the heart of man, He has further added the command to love.

He has done still more, for, lest the human heart should go astray or lose itself in the void, He has Himself set before it the things to love: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."‡ Now, piety is the sovereign means of opening the heart to love God and our neighbour.

There is no doubt that piety is doing its proper work in setting the

* 1 John iii. 14.

† Mark xii. 30.

‡ Mark xii. 31.

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heart towards God, and in carrying it to God under the impulse of love; for, if it be true that love takes its rise in the soul, not by dint of reasoning or counsel, but under the influence of the charm exercised by greatness, goodness, and beauty combined, whoever gives himself to piety will be brought by it under the spell of the divine fascination. It calls us constantly into the presence of God; it requires the eyes of our faith to be abidingly fixed upon His attributes; it leaves us face to face with Him, until we are led on from admiration to intimacy. In order to fix our attention upon Him more effectively, it shows Him to us living in flesh like ours, veiling His splendour enough for us to draw near, and yet allowing enough rays of beauty and goodness to come through to kindle love in our hearts. In Jesus Christ, it is love itself that piety offers us, love suffering and dying for us. In mental prayer, at Holy Mass, in Holy Communion, in the depths of our own heart, everywhere piety speaks to us of Jesus, and says: "He is there; He loves thee; He calls thee; He is waiting for thee." From the time of

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St. Paul to our own days, what a glow of love has not piety enkindled! What burning words have sprung from the hearts of saints, beginning with the humble confession of St. Peter, "Lord, thou knowest that I love Thee,"* down to the cry of the soul uttered by Lacordaire! Whence did St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Theresa, St. Vincent de Paul, and so many others, get the feelings that filled their hearts and bosoms, and breathed forth in sighs so full of love, unless it were in exercises of piety, never weary of communion with God? Their piety moulded their hearts to the love of God and of Christ Jesus.

But where the love of God rules, there, too, rules the love of our neighbour: "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."† And St. John, commenting on this word of the Master, says in turn: "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not?"

* John xxi. 17.

† John xiii. 35.

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And this commandment we have from God, that he, who loveth God, love also his brother."* It seems as if God would not accept an abstract love on our part; He only considers real and puts down to our credit the concrete love that we yield to Him in the persons of our brethren.

Furthermore, He does not want us to put on merely an appearance of love, and merely to imitate its generous promptings; He wishes this love to be real, and the heart to expand and to surrender itself. Ostentatious piety, which is lacking in depth, does not inspire real love, but only produces imitations of it, whereas true piety, that stirs the heart to its depths, makes true love spring up in it.

There are pious hearts, like that of St. Vincent de Paul, which are moved by the distress of others, which gather cast-off children, which protect innocence, which visit the sick and clothe the naked, which provide work or bread for those who are dying of hunger, and which extend the hand of sympathy to all who are weak. When I see hearts untouched by the suffer-

* 1 John iv. 20, 21.

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ings of others, and which pass by in indifference or even turn away from those in rags, I say that true piety has never imbued them.

There are pious hearts, like that of St. Francis of Sales, belonging to those who, with a smile on their lips, and with benevolence within, fill those who have recourse to them with peace and joy; and, impregnated with the perfume of Christ,* they fill all who see them with the balm of happiness. There is no true piety in those whose sullen mien and arid speech breathe selfishness and strike cold into the soul.

There are pious hearts, like St. Paul's or St. Francis Xavier's, which are moved at seeing towns and whole nations given over to idolatry and vice, in which zeal inspires the generous surrender of self to go to the ends of the earth, and to spread the good news of salvation at the cost of labours innumerable. There is no true piety in those dead hearts who feel no pain at hearing their God blasphemed or at seeing souls perish.

Those, too, have pious hearts, who,

* 2 Cor. ii. 15.

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by their friendliness offer a warm and sure shelter to the discouraged or disillusioned, to repentant prodigals and the wounded in life's battle, and to those whose steps are beginning to be insecure. "He that hath found a friend, hath found a treasure,"* says Holy Scripture. And a human heart becomes this inestimable treasure when it is permeated through and through by piety. On the contrary, neither the affection nor the faithfulness of the heart is assured, if God do not reign within it by piety.

Would that persons in religion might make those around them feel that piety has neither closed nor hardened their hearts! If they make themselves loved, it is God Himself who will be loved in them.

Piety, however, not only expands, but at the same time rules and guards the heart. Having a heart is not at all the same thing as being given up to the caprice of sentimentalism; it is not to be without heart to withdraw it from pillage and corruption.

The heart, indeed, is exposed to a

* Eccclus. vi. 14.

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double danger : it may be mistaken as to its object and go astray, or it may push its feeling to excess, and thus lose its fineness and equilibrium. It goes astray when it gets attached to things that were not made for it ; in every situation, in marriage as in the cloister, there are illegitimate affections that must be banished—affections which would upset order in a heart or in a household. The heart is lost, if it allows itself to be taken by such deceitful bait. It becomes poisoned and destroys its own virtue, if, even in the most lawful affections, it urges its feelings to the point of febrile delirium. The wastage of soul wrought by violence is already too much, but the worst consequences may follow upon the fall of the heart into sensualism, for mean and ignoble things might occur to defile and tarnish hearts that more reserve would have maintained in honour.

But no power has such influence as piety to keep the heart within the right limits, to preserve it from shame, to withhold it, if necessary, from the slough of the senses. Piety, then, acts by means of the religious thoughts that it suggests and by the graces that

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it obtains, "God sees me," then says the soul in which piety is alive. "I will not offend His eyes; He loves me, and I will not deal a mortal blow at my Father's heart. He has made my soul His temple, and I will not defile the sanctuary in which He dwells. I have solemnly made Him the entire gift of my heart, and I will not break my word. And then, my heart is my very life; if I let my heart go I shall lose my life, and I shall scatter its strength, and bring to naught all that, in my zeal, I would attain to." Under the sway of such thoughts as these, and many others, the will grows stronger, prayer rises to the lips with intensity, and the help of God comes down; the heart is shielded from danger, perhaps kept from sin, and a life is saved.

XV

PIETY CALMS THE SENSES

OF all the promises of life that are given by piety, there is none more consoling to the heart of the Christian than that of victory over the flesh and peace of the senses.

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Nothing, indeed, is more humiliating and more painful to a soul united to God than the base rebellion of the flesh and the delirium of the senses. St. Paul himself complains of it bitterly in his Epistle to the Romans: "For the good which I will, I do not," he says, "but the evil which I will not, that I do. Now if I do that which I will not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore I myself, with the mind, serve the law of God; but, with the flesh, the law of sin."*

This inner war between the spirit and the flesh, between goodness and sin, has for its battle-field every human heart. Its violence varies, no

* Rom. vii. 19-25.

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doubt, according to age and temperament; but, with slight differences, every soul is an arena where virtue and honour are at stake.

There are those who yield early in the struggle: whether it be weakness of character, blindness of spirit, or intoxication of the senses, they acquiesce in defeat and bow their heads under the degrading yoke of lust. Perhaps they summon excuses to their aid, but the most learned theories do not lift the shame from their conscience, nor the burden of such a slavery.

On the other hand, there are men who never lay down their arms, and who, even if cast down at times, never admit that they are defeated. These are valiant and noble souls. Some struggle on year after year without bringing their enemy to the ground; others have a speedier triumph, and remain, if they are vigilant, masters of the field.

History records the names of these pure souls who have overcome the flesh with the spirit. From the times of a St. Agnes, a St. Cecilia, a St. Lucy, down to the chaste maidens of our own days; since the ages of a

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St. Benedict, a St. Bernard, a St. Francis of Assisi, down to the saintly Christians of to-day, and including the ranks of the religious and of the priests of the present time, pure souls have been innumerable. Even in the midst of the corruption of the world they have arisen, modest, but brave, as a living protest, and they have not ceased to bear witness to man's power to establish the control of the spirit over the flesh.

Their peace has been bought by hard fighting. For it is not from want of struggles that they have been chaste; but they have become so by going through temptations triumphantly. It is told of St. Gertrude that after a violent storm of passion, she said to God: "But where wast Thou, Lord, while Thy servant was shaken in the tempest?" and a voice replied from the inner depths of her heart: "I was in the very centre of thy soul, and there I was helping thee in thy victory." Such is the reward of virtue; the senses only remain in subjection after they have been reduced to slavery.

And what, through so many ages, has given to so many great souls

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this dominion over the flesh, this strange power to control the senses? To acute observers, it appears to be the result neither of energy of character nor the particular fruit of intellectual ability, but the proper gift of piety. A great modern philosopher, Hippolyte Taine, noted it well: it is piety, and particularly piety towards the Eucharist, that makes souls chaste. As the fury of wild beasts falls beneath the sweeping gaze and under the caressing hand of the tamer, as the violence of waves breaks down and grows calm in the ring of soft oil that surrounds the threatened ship in the open sea, so the brute passions of the flesh become calm in the beneficent atmosphere of piety; lust, the wild animal, lies down trembling and submissive at the feet of Christ ruling in the heart by means of piety.

This happy efficacy of piety is a fact. Spiritual directors know it; and this is why they prescribe piety to sinners as a remedy, and to the pure as a safeguard.

But whence does piety get this quality of power?

It obtains it first from grace; for,

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since it is a prayer, and, above all, a form of communion with God, it opens for itself the treasures of grace, and takes from them the gifts of preservation and strength. However mysterious grace may be, it is none the less a real help, the help of God applied to the soul within ; its mode of action escapes our notice, but is none the less deep.

What is more within our grasp is the manner of influence of the interior activity within us, which we call piety. So far as we have taken cognizance of it, piety, besides the grace that it merits, tends of itself to produce chastity, because it withdraws the soul from the flesh, because it deprives the flesh of the feeding-ground of sensuality, and because it mortifies the senses.

Piety, where it is a living reality, withdraws the soul from the flesh. Certainly, it cannot, in our present conditions, altogether detach the soul from the senses ; but at least it carries it away far from all that is low into the higher regions of the moral ideal, towards heaven, where God calls it and awaits it. In fact, by means of contemplation, it keeps

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the attention fixed upon God, upon Christ and the Saints ; it raises the mind into the realm of light. By the holy desires that it provokes, it awakens the taste for things that are pure, and gives the soul a distaste for gross pleasures, filling it with celestial delights. By the impulses to which it gives rise, it tears away the soul from earthly impressions, and bears it on towards nobler forms of enjoyment. Piety, being by nature an interior impulse, liberates the soul from the prison of the senses, to introduce it unshackled into the kingdom of life.

And, at the same time as it strips the soul free from its bonds, piety takes away from the flesh that which fosters its lusts and stimulates its rebellion. There is no doubt that unwholesome performances and wanton pictures are the fuel of dangerous excitement for the senses. When they are imprinted on the sense-perception, it is possible that no disturbance may arise ; but they remain there as a leaven of evil, and they develop in the dark, until they break forth into fearful incitements to what is wrong. Piety, which

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counsels modesty, puts the soul on its guard against looks of frivolity and curiosity, against worldly talk, and against imprudent reading; it watches at the gate of the soul to close it against the entry of all sensations that may do injury to its peace.

But this vigilant activity, which we call piety, carries its solicitude still further. Not satisfied with removing the soul from danger, it does not hesitate to attack the enemy in his own dominions. And so it practises mortification of the body without stint. Without depriving the flesh of its necessary sustenance, it forbids it exciting gratification, such as dainty dishes and highly spirituous drinks; for, if it is necessary for the flesh to live, it is not good for it to get the upper hand. Daily and diligent work also keeps the flesh under by the continuous wear that it imposes. Lastly, maceration, fast, discipline, and iron chain, are so many curbs used by fervent piety to bridle the transports of sensuality.

And let it not be said that the flesh is thus rather enfeebled than subdued, for experience shows that,

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in the chaste, life is not extinguished, but flourishes. In the happy peace which they have secured by means of piety, they are the most energetic, the most hard-working, and the most devoted. They are neither enervated nor lessened; they are strong, because they possess freedom and integrity. Would that piety, attaining its highest activity in all those who profess it, might produce in all Christians this calm of the senses, and this increase of the higher life!

XVI

PIETY ENLIGHTENS THE MIND

THE mind itself, a citadel impregnable against any power of man, participates in turn in the benefits of piety; for, through piety, it is thrown open to God, who floods it with His light.

Whatever certain gloomy thinkers may say about it, piety in no wise changes for the worse the natural brightness of the mind; it does not in any way narrow its vision or curtail the scope of its outlook; it does not injure in the least its freedom or

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activity for inquiry. Thus, the life of piety does no hurt to the life of the mind.

On the contrary, it is a valuable aid to intellectual cultivation, both by the recollection which it prescribes, and by the supernatural light which it sheds upon the soul.

Piety does, indeed, encourage habits of recollection; it recalls the soul from the things that distract it, and forces it to turn its attention within. Now, there is nothing so hurtful to intellectual work as the scattering of one's faculties; nor is there anything more favourable to study than the capacity for living within oneself. For it is not enough to see everything, nor to read everything, in order to know everything. What is of importance is to understand, and to ponder in one's soul what is said by books and men. Piety, by creating in the mind conditions which are favourable to meditation, co-operates in developing it.

It gives further help by the supernatural illumination which it throws upon the objects of human knowledge. How many truths of the highest order, which reason alone

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would only discern in a dim twilight, are clearly outlined by faith, which is sustained by piety. Amongst these truths are the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, the two which are of the greatest interest for us to know.

And if, moreover, we need examples to support this doctrine, the history of the Church provides us with the most illustrious names. The genius of St. Paul and of St. Augustine, far from being extinguished at the time of their conversion, rather owed the best of its splendour to their ardent piety. St. Thomas Aquinas was the most eminent of the doctors of the Middle Ages, and the most pious of Christians. Bossuet, all of whose writings were filled with piety, lost none of his breadth of mind on that account. If we take away from Pascal what he gets from piety, his works will be deprived of their most striking characteristics. And if those who are pious have often appeared to be narrow and stunted, it must not be put down to their piety, but to the weakness of their intelligence or to the slackness of their will.

Nevertheless, it is, properly speak-

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ing, in the region of things supernatural that piety enlightens the mind.

Beyond the vast field of Nature, the phenomena and laws of which have been given over to the patient investigation of man, opens out the profound domain of mysteries. Left to itself, the mind of man cannot enter into it; but faith takes him by the hand and introduces him thereto. It says to him: "See thy God who has created thee; He fills the universe with His presence, while, at the same time, He is in the depths of thy heart. Thy reason perceived the unity of His nature; now contemplate the Trinity of His Persons. He has created thee in His own image, and thy soul bears His imprint. Thou comest from Him, and thou returnest to Him. Therein know thy destiny, and learn the meaning of thy life. This present life is thy wealth; take care not to lose any part of this gift. Every moment of it is precious, since it enables thee to act rightly and to purchase the life that has no end. Thou wast fallen, it is true; but God took pity on thee, and stretched out His hand to thee in

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giving thee His Son ; by Jesus Christ He has saved thee from slavery ; He is saving thee from ignorance and vice, and He will save thee from death eternal. In the present, and in the hereafter, He is thy life."

These beautiful and consoling prospects, which are revealed by faith alone, exactly reply to all the questions that torment the hearts of men. Science satisfies our superficial curiosity, but the serious anxieties of the spirit are only dissipated by faith. What am I ? Whence come I ? Whither am I going ? These are the things that interest men of all climates and centuries ; once enlightened on these points, they are at peace about the rest. Faith gives us firm, definite, and clear replies. Apart from faith, the mind of man is ever in hesitation and liable to error, like a person walking in the dark. Even to-day, where there is no faith, there is the same uncertainty as amongst the pagans of old, or else there is nothing but foolish negation. Look around you ; he who is wanting in faith is also lacking in the true knowledge of the origin, the end, and of the meaning of life.

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If faith is a gift so precious that the Apostle was able to say, "The just man liveth by faith,"* the vitality of a man's faith will be the measure of his life; the more you believe, the more you will live. And here it is that piety comes in, for it contributes vitality and activity to the whole-hearted faith that accepts all the articles of the Creed. While faith continues slumbering, although entire, in many Christians, it is wide awake and ardent in those who are given to piety. By faith the eyes are opened to supernatural truths; by piety the look becomes keen and piercing, and is filled with illuminating splendours. What wonder is it, if the soul, when brought by piety into contact with God, bathes in light!

It is in those who are simple, though without intellectual culture, yet united to God by fervent piety, that this interior enlightenment appears in all its clearness. As to God, the soul, and religious truths and morality, and as to the ordering of their lives, they have views that are surprising, and that no learning has given them, but which have been re-

* Gal. iii. 11.

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vealed to them by their intercourse with God, and by nothing else. St. Theresa had but little learning, and, nevertheless, what deep insight into divine mysteries and into the human soul is to be found in her works! Marie Eustelle, a pious maiden, who only knew how to use a needle, left behind her pages, charming in their delicacy and faith, written under the inspiration of God in the Eucharist, in whose presence she spent whole nights in contemplation. How many peasants and humble women, taught by piety, speak of the ways of God with as much competence, and, above all, with more freedom and unction, than learned theologians! If the form of their utterance is less accurate, yet, on the other hand, how much fuller it is of light!

From the heart all on fire with piety come these divine splendours to illuminate the mind. For, to use the language of St. Paul, the heart has eyes which are able to penetrate the mysteries of God and of Christ, as well as those of our destiny.* Jesus Himself tells us that the heart can

* Eph. i. 18, 19.

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see, but only on condition that it is pure : "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God."* And therefore Pascal was right when he wrote: "The heart has reasons that the reason cannot apprehend: we know it in innumerable ways. . . . It is the heart that perceives God, and not reason. This is what faith is: God known by the heart, and not by reason."† He says further: "Do not wonder at seeing simple people believe without reasoning. God gives them the love of Himself and a hatred of themselves. He inclines their hearts to believe. We shall never believe with a trust that is effective and of faith, unless God incline the heart; and we shall believe as soon as He gives the inclination."‡

The intuitions of the heart, which are so full of suggestiveness in things human, since one knows so quickly and so readily what one loves, have then a great power in the things of God. Piety gives them, because it carries the heart to God and enables it to taste the Lord, and because it

* Matt. v. 8.

† "Pensées," art. xiii., 14.

‡ *Ibid.*, 10.

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makes one experience in life itself the goodness of God. Piety is love, and from the fire that it kindles in the heart emanate the beams that enlighten our whole being.

XVII

PIETY MAKES MEN APOSTLES

PIETY, as we have said, is an interior life, but a life that cannot be confined within. It ferments like leaven in the midst of the soul, and as soon as it has attained a certain degree of heat, it must find a way out. As the heat of the sun sends forth its rays to carry to a distance its light and fertility, so the heart that is on fire with the love of God is unable to keep in confinement the holy ardour with which it glows. And, further, piety, after being sanctifying, becomes conquering.

Follow St. Paul when he is filled with Jesus, after having been overthrown by Him on the way to Damascus. When he says, "I live, now not I ; but Christ liveth in me,"*

* Gal. ii. 21.

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he gives you the measure of his piety. Would you next know the kind of Apostle he is? Then hear him: "Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel. A necessity lieth upon me. . . .^{*} The charity of Christ presseth us. . . .[†] So that by all means Christ be preached: in this also I rejoyce, yea, and will rejoyce."[‡] Then see him in Athens: he is violently moved within on seeing the city wholly given up to the worship of false gods; he goes to the Areopagus, and there he boldly preaches his risen Master.

This apostolic discontent is felt by all the Saints who come after him.

In the twelfth century we find St. Bernard, while still in the world, with such fervour in his speech that he wins his friends and carries them off to Citeaux: and as soon as he becomes a monk, he takes in the whole world in the sweep of his ambition, and all Europe is moved by the ardour of his words.

In the next century, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic carry piety and the work of the apostolate to its

^{*} 1 Cor. ix. 16. [†] 2 Cor. v. 14.

[‡] Phil. i. 18.

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highest pitch. Is there anyone that more really deserves the name of "religious" than the poor man of Assisi and the founder of the Rosary? In the vast monasteries, where they receive such multitudes of young novices, do we not find piety put in the fore-front, and is not prayer the bread on which their vigorous souls are fed? Thus it is that they are moulded to the apostolate; from these burning centres, the novitiates, go forth thousands of apostles to spread the fire of divine love amongst the nations.

If there be a soul who incarnates piety to the fullest degree, it is indeed St. Theresa. But so warm a heart cannot help being an apostle. While still a child, she escapes from her father's house, because she is going, she says, to preach the Gospel to the unbelievers. And since her sex closes the door of foreign missions to her, she will carry on the work in the mystery of the cloister; she and her daughters will amass a treasure of sacrifices and prayers, which, in virtue of the communion of Saints, will go to fertilize the wild lands which are to be watered with

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the sweat and blood of St. Francis Xavier and his companions.

Our own age gives us an illustration of the apostolic power of piety. In our seminaries and convents, do we not find that the generous missionaries, who are ready to sacrifice comfort and country, are always recruited from amongst the most fervent? Is there even one pious heart, which is ardently pious, who has not had at times the sublime aspiration of devoting itself to the great work of missions? And, in the parish, who are the devoted helpers of the priest, if they are not those who are pious? Cannot the priest rely upon them just in proportion to the extent in which they are frankly God's?

Experience proves that the priest, too, increases or decreases in missionary zeal according as his piety rises or falls. Without piety he would be without zeal; he might still be full of activity, but his activity would be barren. Fervour alone can stir him up; at least, fervour alone can assure the success of his work by assuring him of God's blessing.

If piety alone produces zeal and

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makes it last, that is no doubt because the apostolic spirit is a grace connected with prayer; but it is also because piety evokes in the heart just those feelings that give rise to zeal. For there are three kinds of love that mingle together in the heart of the apostle: the love of Jesus Christ, the love of the Church, and the love of souls. But piety is exactly what kindles and sustains these three kinds of love.

To begin with, it is, indeed, under the breath of piety that the love of Jesus commences and grows. In the living power of faith, the soul adores, in Jesus, its God made perceptible to the heart of man; it recognizes Him as merciful and good, condescending and generous. It follows His steps from the Crib to Calvary, and embraces Him on the Cross, saying with St. Paul: "He loved me and delivered Himself for me,"* and adds: "I will love Him in return, and will give myself up for His sake." But how are we to give ourselves up for Christ's sake? The pious soul discovers the secret of this: "If Jesus," she says, "has shed His blood for me, at least,

* Gal. ii. 20.

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I will spend mine for Him. It is not enough to show that I love Him by living a holy life; I wish to prevent His blood from being wasted. He has paid a ransom for souls; I will go in search of the souls for which He died, and I will bring them back to Him. To this dear Shepherd, who wishes still to go in search of the sheep that are lost, I will give the help of my whole being—of my heart to love them, of my voice to call them back, and of all my members to find and recover them. Where would He have me go? Whether it be to the end of the world or to the land of my birth matters little, provided that I can be of service to Him. My sole ambition is to be the means of bringing souls to love Him.” What zeal for work, what disinterestedness, are aroused in the heart by such feelings of love!

With the love of Jesus there is naturally joined the love of the Church, for it is in the Church that Jesus continues His life. What filial piety the Christian feels in his love of the Church! She is his mother; he respects her, cherishes her, and wishes to see her great and

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honoured. Whatever affection he has for Jesus, he carries on to the Church. He is full of holy jealousy for her glory, and he wishes to extend her sway ; and hence he is full of zeal for her sacred interests. " Why," says he, " the Church is my mother, and am I not to be grieved when I see her insulted and buffeted, and attacks made upon her rights ? I will be her defender in the eyes of all men : by my conduct I will bring her honour ; by my fidelity to her and pride in her, I will prove the intrepidity of her sons ; by my words I will repay the insults that outrage her ; and by my missionary endeavours I will maintain her rights. But it is not enough to defend her : I will work for the extension of her sway. Her kingdom consists of the souls of the faithful : I will therefore win souls for her. I will win them for her by the exercise of my influence amongst those of my own circle ; I will win them by taking part in clubs for the enrolment of the young, and by helping on with purse or in person such apostolic works as make it their object to gain heathen lands." Missionaries at home as

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well as abroad, all these have given their lives with the noble desire of serving their mother, the Church.

Lastly, piety produces the love of souls, because it steeps the heart of the Christian in the divine loving-kindness, and inclines it to compassion. Whoever participates in the life of Christ feels all that Jesus felt,* and says with Him: "I have compassion on the multitude. . . .† I will not send them away fasting.‡ . . . Come to Me all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you. . . .§ Him that cometh to Me, I will not cast out.|| . . . He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone."¶ All these divine words rise to the lips and inspire the actions of those who pray, and of those in whom the life of piety bears sway. And is not having such feelings in the heart having apostolic zeal? For an apostle is nothing else than one who has pity on the poor and stretches out a helping hand to them, who raises them up and brings

* Phil. i. 7.

† Mark viii. 3.

‡ John vi. 37.

† Mark viii. 2.

§ Matt. xi. 28.

¶ John viii. 7.

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them to themselves by bringing them to God. It is this compassion that opens men's hearts to him ; he brings them kindness and generosity and devotion. By loving souls he wins them ; and when he has won them, he gives them to God.

It is, then, true that piety makes men apostles. If it is a good thing to say to the young, "Be apostles," it is still better to call upon them to be pious. The apostolic sense will not arise without piety : true piety will inevitably produce apostolic feeling.

XVIII

PIETY FLOODS THE SOUL WITH JOY

PIETY crowns its work and completes its benefits by flooding the soul with joy ; and, in doing this, it grips the Christian to the very depths of his being.

For man aspires to joy in virtue of an irresistible need : he calls for it by all his powers, he seeks it with all his energies, he flings himself upon it wherever he thinks he can find it. He opens his heart to all that gives

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him a gleam of it, and he is grieved at everything that disturbs it or that takes it from him. No one can escape this law of nature: joy is what the workman looks for in his injurious alcoholic drink, and it is joy that the Carmelite will partake of in the austere seclusion of the cloister. However different may be the sources from which it is drawn, everywhere people wish to have happiness.

Let us not blame a man for this instinctive greed of joy. Not only can he not prevent it, but it contains too many advantages for him to try to rid himself of it. For joy, by dilating the heart and by the enjoyment that it affords, becomes a force for living.

What is living, indeed, if it be not to keep on working, to endure suffering, and to control oneself by virtue? But all this cannot be done without effort, and the effort is of such a nature that the will needs a powerful energy to accomplish it, and, above all, to persevere in it. But a soul without joy has no interior energy; joy alone can stir the heart to action and maintain it therein.

Who has not experienced the dis-

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astrous consequences of depression? The soul is then plunged in darkness, the heart is drenched with bitterness, and the will is broken with discouragement. Expect no effort from a man who is weary; as long as he is in an enervated condition, he is incapable of any generous action. If, however, temptation come in his way, it will take possession of him, because he is ready to give himself up to the first claimant. Ill-omened times, times of sin and of every kind of failing, are the hours in which the moral nature is submerged by such interior desolation. They are barren lands if hope do not fertilize them—lands in which thorns and fruitless briars abound, instead of rich harvests.

But get a ray of joy to penetrate the discouraged spirit; without doing away with duty, work and suffering, which are the inevitable lot of all human existence, pour some drops of gladness into the heart that is loaded with such a burden. Immediately you have life, heartiness, courage and heroism, perhaps because you have light and hope. The blood revives, thoughts arise and noble feelings are awakened, activity develops and effort is exerted.

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Before joy came, you had not a man to deal with; but thanks to joy, you have a brave and devoted fellow.

Thus do we learn a great lesson from experience. It teaches us what a responsibility weighs upon those who extinguish joy in a man's heart, for, in killing joy, they kill life itself. But, on the other hand, what a noble mission it is to rekindle life in the soul by means of joy! He spoke well who said that the best of all alms to give is the giving of happiness.

Whence comes joy? It does not come from outside, but it springs up within the soul.

The external world cannot, in fact, either give joy or disturb it. Worldly festivities and sensual pleasures do not contain it; they intoxicate the senses and they make the soul dizzy for a time, but they leave emptiness behind them, and regret and moral suffering. According to the saying of St. Augustine, "They lie, they die, and they kill." The flatteries of men weave crowns that quickly fade; the noise of their applause is soon over, whilst the silence that follows is both very long and very deep. Riches bring, on their part, anxiety and fear;

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the gleam of gold is not the sweet ray of happiness.

As a fair offset to this, the world is as powerless to take away joy as to give it. The brute forces of nature may cripple us, but they cannot make us despond, if we ward their blows from our hearts. And it is the same with the persecutions of men, whether they fling the darts of their words at us, or stir themselves against our interests, or chill the social atmosphere in which we live by their antipathy. All external disturbances leave us untouched so long as we are masters of our own hearts and protect them from such attacks.

Joy is within us: there it takes its rise, and expands, and is consummated.

Joy is, indeed, the fruit of peace—not the false peace of indifference, but the peace that wins a living soul by self-conquest. Give peace to the mind, by luminous convictions on the essential problems of life. Give peace to the heart, by setting it free from the snares in which it gets taken, and by arming it against deceits and treacheries. Give peace to the imagination, by delivering it from the fatal

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fancies that so often disturb it. Give peace to the senses, by regulating their activity according to reason. Give peace to the will, by maintaining its aptitude for effort in the face of difficulties. And, lastly, give peace to the conscience, by the testimony of never being consciously false to duty. By this universal peace you will have produced joy within you. At least, let this peace reign to some extent by frequent victories, and joy will have made its entry into your soul.

And this is where piety comes in. For religion promises joy by means of peace, but it only gives it to those who are religious to the point of piety.

And that religion promises peace and joy not only for the life to come, but also for this life. This you know from the teaching of Holy Scripture: "Peace I leave with you," says Jesus; "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you. . . ."* These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and your joy may be filled.† In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have over-

* John xiv. 27.

† John xv. 11.

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come the world. . . . * You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice: and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy . . . and your joy no man shall take from you. . . . † Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and speak all that is evil against you untruly for My sake: be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. . . . ‡ Blessed are they that mourn: blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: blessed are the merciful: blessed are the clean of heart: blessed are the peacemakers." §

When the Angels announced to the shepherds the birth of the Saviour, they said to them: "We bring you good tidings of great joy." || And when the Apostles preach the religion of Jesus to the world, they present it as a joy: "These things we write to you, that you may rejoice and your joy may be full. . . . ¶ Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say rejoice. . . . ** Always re-

* John xvi. 33.

† John xvi. 20, 22.

‡ Matt. v. 11, 12; Luke vi. 23.

§ Matt. v. 3 *et seq.*

|| Luke ii. 10.

¶ 1. John i. 4.

** Phil. iv. 4.

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joyce. Pray without ceasing. . . .*
We are helpers of your joy . . .†
and you are "my joy and my crown."‡
St. Paul, while incessantly harassed
with persecutions, protests that he
rejoices: "I exceedingly abound
with joy in all our tribulation."§

Being apostles of joy, the disciples
of Jesus live themselves in invariable
joy. On the first occasion on which
they appear before their persecutors,
and when they are beaten with rods,
"they went from the presence of the
council rejoicing that they were
accounted worthy to suffer reproach
for the name of Jesus."|| Thence-
forward, the radiancy of joy becomes
the characteristic of the faithful.
"See how they love one another!"
was said of the first Christians.
When they are on the way to torture
and to death for God, they cry out :
"We were never at a happier feast."
The Saints, who are the true heirs of
the ancient fervour, are also the
readiest for joy : happy in conscience,
whatever their external trials may
be, they have the power to create

* 1 Thess. v. 16.

† Phil. iv. 1.

|| Acts v. 41.

† 2 Cor. i. 23.

§ 2 Cor. vii. 4.

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peace and the feeling of happiness in others. And in this they gather such force of character that they say with St. Theresa : " Give me suffering or death ;" or else with St. John of the Cross : " Let me suffer and be despised for Thee, O Lord."

And the race of such souls is not extinct. It lives still in our midst amongst those Christians who are entirely subject to the sway of piety. Follow their procedure closely. They are neither harsh, nor sad, nor morose, but engaging and kindly. In the limpid clearness of their looks, in the calm repose of their features, you have a pure expression of their interior peace. The deep joy that shines through their words and on their faces is the fruit of their living piety.

Piety, in fact, has both brought peace and stirred up life in their souls.

It has shed the light of faith on the problems that usually fill men with anxiety, and their minds rest in the calm possession of truth. It has kept their hearts from those swervings that trouble one's existence for ever, and if it has entered into a heart that has strayed, it has brought it back

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from far-off exile and purified it from defilement and degradation. It has given these hearts such high and certain hopes that they are strong enough to bear disillusionment and separation—not, indeed, without suffering, but without flinching. It cures souls wounded with grief, or which have been deeply rent. It has the gift of turning the bitterest cup into sweetness. It is, above all, an invaluable tonic for the will, and, by means of it, the will triumphs over the temptations of the evil one, and over despondency. By it, too, the conscience keeps or recovers its peace, because, by its means, conscience avoids moral falls or raises itself from them.

And note that piety does not produce this peace by reducing the soul to a state of slumber or of lethargy, which is a diminution of life. This peace is established after a victory, not after a defeat; it is a conquest of self, not an abdication. The soul that lives by piety, as may be seen by observation, is full of activity, enterprising, intrepid and influential, and all the more energetic outwardly, the more it is at liberty within.

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Its strength, like its peace, come from the fact that piety imparts to it a keen and profound sense of the presence of God. What joy is found in the feeling of the possession of God, which fills the soul with an anticipation of heaven! What strength there is in the conviction that God is there in all His power and loving-kindness, that He will overcome all temptations, that He will wipe away all tears, that He will make good all losses, and that He Himself will be the spring of all our actions! What eagerness there will be to abandon oneself to His influence, and to make oneself the free and conscious instrument of His grace! It was this sense of God, felt in the heart through piety, that flooded a St. Francis Xavier with joy, and made him say: "Stay, Lord, and suspend Thy favours, for Thy servant can bear no more." And it is God, thus felt in the heart by piety, who to-day still sustains the fidelity of elect souls, and keeps them as a precious leaven for the regeneration of the future.

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